

25A 2020 SML
MT 20:1-16

This evening/morning, Jesus is trying to annoy us, or to put it more delicately, He is trying to provoke us in the Gospel. What's going on in the parable? What's the problem? Couldn't it have been avoided? And what does that have to do with what Jesus is trying to tell you and me at this Mass right now?

What's the story? Well, the story is simple. You have a man who has a vineyard. And he goes out and he hires workers. He hires you at 6:00 in the morning, comes back out and you at 9:00, comes back out and hires you at noon, you at 3:00 and you at 5:00. He doesn't tell the 9:00ers he will give a whole day's pay. He tells them he will pay what's just. He just tells the rest of us "Come and work."

That's the reality. What's the problem in all this? Why are you so upset? Well, you're upset because you worked from 6:00 to who knows when. He only worked for an hour, two, three at best, and come pay time, he got what you got. Notice what happens in this parable. The landowner calls his foreman and says, "Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last. Line them all up, start with the last and

pay him a whole day's wage, which of course provokes the 6 o'clockers, right?

Some of us have companies. We run payrolls. Many of us have staff that we take care of. I do. It doesn't take a lot to figure out how this problem could have been avoided. Salaries are confidential, right? Just pay him first. He gets a full day's wage. He goes home. He's happy. Pay him last. He's amazed that he got a full day's pay. He wasn't expecting that. He was expecting to get paid for a couple of hours. The landowner doesn't do that. He knew you were going to be angry. He wanted to provoke you.

And so I would suggest that Jesus wants to provoke us. Two things are being said in the scriptures today. First is a great comfort to those who find themselves afflicted right now, and the second is a great affliction to those of us who are rather comfortable.

First the comfort. It's an appeal. It's a really pressing appeal, like the workers who are just standing there doing nothing all day. In essence, to those who have not yet responded, at no matter what age we are, to the call of Jesus to follow Him. Some of us, quite frankly, are idle right now. We are not following the Master, for whatever reason. Perhaps we

are fearful of what's in our past, or we just want the easy A, or perhaps we are just waiting til we are on our deathbed. God is saying, "Work. Come home, now!" He's making an urgent appeal to us to say let the time that has passed be sufficient for sin, which though it may be attractive, is not an enhancement of life. It's a diminishment of life. Be done with it. Come to work. That's the good news. He doesn't care what's in the past. All you have to do is repent and come to work.

The challenging news is he is trying to afflict those of us who don't like the fact that He is this good! "I've been working hard for years, for you, Lord, and this person who has been doing nothing their whole life – you're suddenly going to forgive? Then why was I working so long and so hard? The Parable of the Prodigal Son comes to mind. Older son mentality.

To those of us having a hard time with this, God is saying, "I am not like that. You want others to pay. I want them to know that they can come back." I want the prodigal son to know he can come back.

God's word is speaking to us today about envy. In a particular way, He is speaking about envy over His mercy, but in a more generic way, He's speaking to those of us who just

find ourselves to be envious in general. Envy is one of the seven deadly sins because it is one of the worst. It's because what we will do as a result of our envy, and what it can lead to.

What's envy? Envy is not jealousy. Envy is a certain sadness over your good fortune. God has blest you and I am miserable because of it. It is essentially competitive. It wants you beneath me. And it leads to hatred because I hate you because of the good that God has blest you with. It is rampant in our culture. It needs to be eradicated from my life and yours if we are serious about being disciples.

The remedy for envy is gratitude. I powerwalked a lot during his pandemic this past spring and summer. And the whole time I prayed. I prayed all four mysteries of the Rosary, to get us through this pandemic, and when I finished the Rosary, I poured out my gratitude to God for everything He has given me, and I name them. The list was pretty much the same each night, some changes here or there, but the powerwalk was a Rosary and a litany of thanks.

A litany of thanks - I encourage you to do the same. That is the essence of good stewardship, that our lives reflect how thankful we are for all the good that God has given us. Does

what we give in terms of time, treasure and talent, does how we come and work show God how thankful we are?

So let's take our eyes off of other people, and put our eyes on Him and all that He has done for us and has promised He will yet do for us. Take to heart God's word today. Those of us who are doing nothing, so far, for the Lord, come to work! Those of us who have been working, but we've been working for pay and not for Him, let's put our eyes back on the reality of what we are supposed to be doing, which is out of great love to work for Him, so that like Paul we too can say, "Life is Christ," and the pay that I want is to know Him more tomorrow than I do today. And it behooves me to have my heart look more and more like His heart, which is big, rich in mercy, eager to forgive, and anxious to call everybody home.