

The Timing of Grace

Every family has at least one "challenging" personality.

He or she might even be a "difficult" personality.

When I was very young, I had a great-uncle who was quite a handful. He was highly opinionated. What's more, he had negative opinions about whole groups and classes of people.

And, he had "names" for people of different ethnic backgrounds.

So if you were Italian, he had a name for you.

If you were Polish, he had a name.

If you were Jewish or Black, he had lots of names for you.

These were not nice names. They were ugly names.

In fact they were so ugly, that I remember my dad telling him that if he didn't stop using that vile language, we weren't coming over his house anymore. My father simply didn't want me exposed to that kind of talk.

That confrontation isn't the end of the story, however.

A few years later, my great-uncle changed. He changed in a big way.

He stopped using those ugly words. His neighbors started to talk about him as the "kindest man in the

neighborhood." What's more, he joined the *Saint Vincent de Paul Society* and started delivering groceries to newly-arrived immigrant families.

When my great-uncle died, we wondered: *Why couldn't he have always been like this? Why did we only get to see this side of him for five short years? Why couldn't he have acted like this sooner?*

I remember my great-uncle whenever I read this Sunday's gospel about the laborers in the vineyard who get to work so late in the day (Matthew 20: 1-6)

The "timing" doesn't seem to make any sense. Why didn't they get to it sooner?

But the "timing" of other people's lives isn't in our hands.

Why and when people "change" isn't something we control.

And isn't it often true of ourselves? How often have we said: *"Why didn't I learn this sooner? Why did it take me so long to change this?* Sometimes the "timing" is even a mystery unto ourselves!

There is an old African-American hymn that goes:

*God is good, all the time.
All the time, God is good.*

We control very little of the "timing" of things.

But whether we begin in the morning or at noon or at in the evening of our lives, God has given us work to do.

To each of us has been given a mission; perhaps even a few.

God's will is, to at some point, catch us up in a labor of love- some kind of work that becomes a blessing unto others. Hopefully, we discover the reward from simply doing it.

We will never be completely in control of the "clock."

But fear not.

God is good, all the time.

All the time, God is good.

Fr. Steven Labaire