

Rev. Toan Do
Isaiah 55:6-9
Philippians 1:20c-24, 27
Matthew 20:1-16a

TWENTY-FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
Epiphany Catholic Church
Louisville, KY, USA
September 20, 2026

In any way or in any form, if we approach this gospel from a conventional method or from a human perspective, we will not be able to understand and will not, in fact, be able to agree with the landowner's way of doing things in a way similar or be likened to that of God. Isaiah reminds us - God's ways are not our ways, and his thoughts are not our thoughts. That gives us a little bit of consolation. In order for us to approach this parable, this story is challenging to our human standards as they are.

You recall two or three weekends ago also in the same gospel...three weekends ago in fact, in that the theme of reconciliation began with the parable or the story in which Peter came to Jesus and asked him, "Lord, if my brother sins against me, how many times do I go to him." And Jesus advises him to go first and talk to his brother and, in a sense, his sister. The point in that gospel, we recall, was, as Jesus says, to win over your brother. Last weekend, another perspective into what we call fraternal corrections. Once again, Peter, who represents the church, came forward and asked Jesus, "Jesus, how many times do I have to forgive my brothers who have sinned against me?" And we recall Jesus replied - Peter thought his offer would be generous - seven times, and Jesus said, "No, 70 times 7." The point again is to gain or to win over a sibling, a brother and a sister, who sins against us in that once again, not only fraternal correction, but the effort to go out and forgive one another without counting the times of forgiveness.

That said, today another theme comes up to us similar to reconciliation, similar to being the purpose of bringing a lost one in the family back into our home. But today, Jesus uses the parable to tell us that the landowner be likened to God in dealing with people who work for their daily wage. And at first, at dawn, and then at nine o'clock and then at noon, at three and finally at five PM in the afternoon, thinking of those who were going out at dawn, working for eight, nine hours. For example, in today's, the second last day of the of summer and by Monday's forecast, if it is true to any extent, the temperature will drop to the 70s. Working in

the conditions of 70 degrees is much better than 94, 95 today. No wonder from a human perspective, those who went out to work in the parable at dawn all day were grumbling against the landowner. And for that reason, in their human standard, they were hoping to receive, say, not only double from the ones who worked for one hour from five to six and received the same daily wage. They were hoping maybe the landowner would be generous, as he is generous, who would give me twice, three times, four times, or nine times more than the one who works for only one hour. But God's way, or God's generosity, is very different from the human standard, from any way in which we can imagine in this world.

I believe that this conversation a couple of days ago, some of my friends sent me a text message that included a video clip from YouTube. Thanks to the access to the internet nowadays, it is open to everyone worldwide. And this gentleman who's speaking on YouTube and challenging the fact that if we are the church, and he used the church in a way, of course, in which he understood...if we are the church, would we be open to welcome ALL people. The fit, he says, as well as the unfit, the sick, as well as the healthy, the wealthy, as well as the poor. Why are there people out there - his argument is - that are looking for a way to be welcomed. And, of course, from a human perspective, and looking at, I would imagine, this gospel reading this weekend, to some extent, his challenge is valid. Because if we try to follow what Jesus is telling us today in the gospel in God's way, we are to open our door to all people from all walks of life. And it is true that we are called to do just that.

However, as we see, after a number of texts back and forth to these friends, I finally said that it is true that we have to try to open our hands and our arms to welcome all people; but there are certain aspects that continue to resist the way we do things or resist how we are to welcome people. Supposedly, if the archbishop asked me to go to downtown Louisville, and I don't know when the last time any of us visited downtown, except those who are going to the Franciscan Kitchen, I imagine that there are homeless; there are those who are poor, truly poor, who have no home. And if I have to ask them or pick them up, put them in my car, or let's say rent a truck and bring them here, house them on our campus, I imagine some of us, some of our parishioners, including myself, probably to some extent would protest. Where do we put them?

Those are the facts of our life, the realities, that really challenge, challenge us how to make sense of what the gospel of the generosity of God is trying to invite us to today; to look beyond the conventional, look beyond the human standards. As God in the parable today, one of the lines that the landowner tells the people who were waiting at 9:00 AM, "Come, work for me and I will pay you the just way."

Thinking of the word "just" from that biblical perspective, from the New Testament perspective, just here, there's so many aspects to it. Not that we work one hour and we receive what we're given for one hour, but just here is the divine justice. God has his way to accommodate all those in their own condition. And for that reason, back to this YouTube story that I heard, I texted back to this friend and said, "Although we try to, as church, as the church, as the community, we try to open our arms and our hands and our doors to those who want to come in and be part of the community; the opposite also makes sense namely, each and every one of them also have to be willing to put in effort."

Just think about the parable here. At dawn, those who were asked and invited to come and work for the landowner, what if they said no? Those who were at 9:00, those who worked at noon and at 3:00, and those, particularly the group who were at 5:00 PM who worked for one hour, what if they said no to the invitation? Of course, the parable today puts us on the spot to see the generosity of God in ways that are so unconventional, in ways that none of our human standards would be able to comprehend and fathom at the end. Like Isaiah in the first reading reminds us, God's way and not human's way. And God's generosity is not human generosity. And in ways that God can help us to work, but also God's generosity, challenges us to put in our effort from both sides of those who are willing to welcome and those who are welcome.

As we move on to this, back to the last weekend and the weekend before, the reconciliation or the theme of reconciliation runs through the gospel in the last three weekends. We once again are called and invited to try to reconcile ourselves and try to go out of our own human standards. The gospel, the parable, asks us to go out of our human methods and reach out to those who cannot help themselves. And once we can do that, those who are wandering out there, those who are poor, those who are ill, those who are homeless, those who are sick, their lives will be touched by God's generosity done through us.