**Fr Matthew Charlesworth, SJ**
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# 25th Sunday in Ordinary Time

**Date:** Sunday, September 20, 2026 | **Season:** Ordinary Time after Easter | **Year:** A
**First Reading:** Isaiah 55:6–9
**Responsorial Psalm:** Psalm 145:2–3, 8–9, 17–18 | **Response:** Psalm 145:18a
**Second Reading:** Philippians 1:20c–24, 27a
**Gospel Acclamation:** Acts 16:14b
**Gospel Reading:** Matthew 20:1–16a
**Preached at:** Our Lady of the Wayside Parish, Mount Pleasant and the Chapel of Emerald Hill Children's Home **in the** Archdiocese of Harare, Zimbabwe**.**

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Last week we heard the parable of the servant whose great debt was forgiven. The Lord was generous with his mercy, and he expected the servant to show the same mercy to others.

Today Jesus continues that lesson.

He tells us about a God whose generosity is greater than our calculations, greater than our ideas of fairness, and sometimes greater than we are comfortable with.

There is a question from Peter just before today's Gospel. After Jesus has spoken about the cost of discipleship, Peter says to him:

> "We have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?"

It is a very human question.

We give, we sacrifice, we work—and we wonder what will come back to us.

But Jesus answers not with a calculation, but with a parable about the generosity of God. The question of reward is answered by a story about grace.

The Kingdom is not a matter of keeping score.

The workers who started early worked through the heat of the day. Others came much later. Some worked only one hour. Yet they all received the same wage.

Something inside us says, "That is not fair."

Perhaps that is exactly why Jesus tells the story.

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The landowner goes out early in the morning, then again at nine, midday, three, and finally at about five.

He asks the last group, “Why have you been standing here all day doing nothing?”

They answer, “Because no one has hired us.”

We are not told that they were lazy. We are told that no one had hired them—no one had chosen them.

Many people in Zimbabwe know that feeling.

A young person finishes school or university and cannot find work. Someone sends application after application and hears nothing. Someone has skills but no opportunity.

After a while, a person can begin to think, “Maybe nobody needs me. Maybe I do not matter.”

But the landowner goes back for the people everybody else has passed over.

They were waiting.

And God saw them.

Our world often measures people by usefulness: What work do you do? How much do you earn? What can you produce?

Even artificial intelligence raises an important question. If a machine can do some work faster than a person, does that make the person worth less?

No.

Our dignity precedes our productivity.

You do not become less valuable because you are unemployed, old, sick, living with a disability, or because the economy has no place for your skills.

At the end of the day, every worker receives one denarius.

The workers who came first were not cheated. They received what had been promised.

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His generosity to the latecomers took nothing away from them.

Justice is done to the first workers. Generosity is shown to the last.

Perhaps the late worker also has people waiting at home. Perhaps food, medicine or transport money is needed. Perhaps there must be sadza on the table that evening.

Jesus is not giving employers a wage policy. He is revealing the generosity of God, who does not reduce a human life to a calculation.

Notice what the Prophet Isaiah tells us in the first reading which may be helpful here.

God says, “My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways.”

The people can see only what has been lost.

God can see what his mercy can begin again.

That is the hope of conversion: seeking the Lord and believing that even after years away from God, there is still a road back; that our past does not have the final word; that God can still call us, even late in the day.

Some meet Christ when they are young. Others come much later.

Some have been faithful Catholics all their lives. Others have wandered away and returned. Some enter the Church at thirty, fifty or seventy.

And sometimes those of us who have been here since six in the morning become suspicious of those who arrive at five o’clock.

We think, “I have been here all my life. Where have you been?”

But the vineyard belongs to God, not to us.

Thirty years of faithful service do not earn us a greater share of God’s love.

A person who comes to Christ late in life does not receive a smaller Christ.

Grace is not paid by the hour.

But grace also calls us into the vineyard.

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It does not leave us standing outside.

I have just returned from my annual retreat, where I was praying with the mystery of the Transfiguration, and it led me to a similar lesson.

Peter wanted to remain on the mountain, but Jesus led him down into the world of service. The grace we receive is not an escape from the vineyard; it sends us back into it.

God continues to call people we did not expect: the person returning to the Church, the person newly received into the Church, our fellow Christians in other churches, the sinner looking for another chance, the person we had already written off.

Let's stay with what is uncomfortable in this parable for a moment.

The first workers are not angry because they received too little.

They are angry because somebody else also received generosity.

We sometimes hear someone say, "I paid the price; why should that person be forgiven?"

Sometimes justice must be defended.

But sometimes beneath the concern for fairness is resentment that another person has received mercy.

That is very close to the complaint of the workers in the vineyard.

Nothing has been taken away from them.

What troubles them is the generosity shown to somebody else.

That is envy.

Envy is more than wanting what another person has.

It is becoming unhappy because something good has happened to somebody else.

And envy can blind us.

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Instead of being grateful for what we have received, we begin comparing ourselves with others and resenting what God has given them.

That is why envy is so dangerous in the life of faith.

It can make us resent the generosity of God himself.

And there can even be envy of grace.

We may think another person has been forgiven too easily.

> "After what he did, he should suffer more."
> "She only came back to church recently. I have been faithful all these years."

Then the landowner asks:

> "Are you envious because I am generous?"

Can I rejoice when God is good to someone else?

Or do I want mercy for myself and strict justice for everybody else?

This does not mean that sin does not matter. It does.

It does not mean that justice does not matter. It does.

But God's goodness is greater than our calculations.

Maybe I am also one of the grumblers.

Maybe I think my years of faithfulness make me more important than somebody else.

Maybe I want God to be generous to me but more careful with others.

And here St Paul, in the second reading, gives us another perspective.

Peter asks, "What then will we have?"

Paul says, "For me, life is Christ."

Paul knows that to be with Christ is his deepest desire. Yet he is willing to remain because his life can still bear fruit for others.

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Peter asks, “What will we receive?”

Paul asks, in effect, “How can my life serve?”

That is the conversion the Gospel asks of us: from calculation to generosity; from asking, “What then will we have?” to asking, “How can I serve?”

And the Psalm tells us why:

> “The Lord is gracious and merciful.”
> “The Lord is good to all.”

Not only to the successful.
Not only to the useful.
Not only to those who arrived first.

> “The Lord is good to all.”

Christ offers himself fully to the lifelong disciple, to the returning Catholic, and to the person only beginning to believe. When we receive him sacramentally, we do not receive a smaller Christ.

And the Christ who gives himself to us sends us out to become generous servants of others.

So let us ask ourselves:

- Who is still standing in the marketplace because nobody has invited them in?
- Whom have I judged because they came late?
- Can I rejoice when God is generous to someone else?

The vineyard belongs to God. The grace is God’s gift. And the invitation remains:

> “You also go into my vineyard.”

May we receive that invitation with humility, and may we become the people through whom others hear it.

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And let us pray that God will free our hearts from envy, so that we can rejoice in his generosity—to us and to others.

Amen.

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In preparing this homily, I consulted various resources to deepen my understanding of today's readings, including using Magisterium AI for assistance. The final content remains the responsibility of the author.