

**25<sup>th</sup> Sunday OT-A: The Economics of Grace: Is 55:6–9; Phil 1:20–24, 27; Mt 20:1–16**

A few years ago, a study looked at how human beings react to fairness. They put two monkeys in side-by-side cages. They gave both monkeys a piece of cucumber for doing a simple task. Both were perfectly happy. But then, the researcher gave the second monkey a sweet, juicy grape instead of a cucumber. When the first monkey saw that, he looked at his cucumber, threw it right back at the researcher's face, and started rattling the bars of his cage in anger.

We laugh at that, but if we are completely honest with ourselves, we do the exact same thing. We have an internal radar for fairness. We keep ledgers. We track who got the promotion, who got the break, who got forgiven after making a mess of things, and who got lucky.

And that is exactly why today's Gospel is so deeply uncomfortable. Jesus tells a story about a landowner who hires workers at 6:00 AM, 9:00 AM, noon, 3:00 PM, and finally, at 5:00 PM—just one hour before the workday ends. When payday comes, he pays the one-hour workers a full day's wage. Naturally, the guys who have been sweating in the scorching sun since dawn start doing the math. They expect a bonus. But instead, they get the exact same amount.

They grumble. They say, *"That's not fair."* And from a strictly human, economic standpoint, they are 100% right. It isn't fair. But Jesus didn't come to teach us human economics. He came to reveal the kingdom of God. And the kingdom of God does not operate on a ledger of human merit; it operates on radical, breathtaking generosity.

Notice what the landowner says to the grumbling workers: *"Are you envious because I am generous?"* That question cuts straight to the human heart. How often do we let someone else's blessing diminish our own joy? The early morning workers were perfectly happy with their wage until they saw what someone else got. Their envy turned their blessing into bitterness.

But look closer at the latecomers. The text says they were standing in the marketplace because *"no one has hired us."* In the ancient world, if you weren't hired, your family didn't eat that night. They weren't lazy; they were desperate, overlooked, and anxious. The landowner wasn't rewarding laziness; he was

responding to human need. He looked at them and saw their dignity, not just their output.

This is the good news, but it is also the challenging news. The good news is that God does not give us what we deserve. If God kept a strict ledger of our merits, our flaws, our missed opportunities, and our mistakes, every single one of us would fall short. As the prophet Isaiah reminds us in the first reading, God's ways are not our ways. God's thoughts are as high above ours as the heavens are above the earth. Human justice says, *You get what you earn*. Divine mercy says, *I give you what you need because I love you*.

Whether you have been a faithful, devout Catholic your entire life—sweating in the vineyard since 6:00 AM—or whether you are just finding your way back to God at the eleventh hour of your life, the reward/grace is the same. The reward/grace is Him. God doesn't love the lifelong saint more than the newly returned prodigal. He loves us all with an infinite capacity.

The challenging part for us is to stop acting like the first monkey. We have to stop measuring God's grace toward others with a tape measure. When someone who has lived a messy life experiences God's forgiveness, we shouldn't grumble/complain/compare. We should rejoice. As God is generous to you and you too be generous to Him.

This week, let's challenge ourselves to drop the ledger. When we look at our lives, let's not ask if things are "fair." Instead, let's look at the breath in our lungs, the community around us, and the mercy we receive every single day, and simply say: *Thank you for being so incredibly generous. Amen*