

TWENTY FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, 2026

Last Sunday, we heard from chapter 18 of St. Matthew's Gospel, and this Sunday we hear from chapter 20. What happened to chapter 19? I looked it up. Chapter 19 is read at daily Mass in the nineteenth and twentieth weeks of Ordinary Time, and on some special occasions, such as weddings. Chapter 19 of Matthew contains the Lord Jesus' teaching about divorce and remarriage, His teaching that the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to the childlike (as opposed to childish!), and His teaching that it is easier for a camel to pass through a needle's eye than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. That is all good to hear.

Today, of course, we actually have the first part of chapter 20 of St. Matthew's Gospel, The Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard, in which those who are hired at the last hour are paid as much as those who started work at the beginning of the day. This Parable is a reminder that God's ways are not our ways. That principle, that God's ways are not our ways, can be read back into chapter 19 of Matthew. When it comes to good works, marriage, children, and wealth, God's ways are not the ways of the world.

Chapter 20 of Matthew reminds Christians that salvation is not simply a reward for good works. Chapter 25 of Matthew reminds us that good works are essential for salvation, since "whatever you did (or did not) do for the least of My brethren, you did (or did not) do for Me." In chapter 20, however, we learn that salvation is not a matter of doing a certain number of service hours: if you do enough service hours you get into Heaven, but if you don't do enough service hours you're stuck outside. No. If Acts 8 teaches us vehemently that the gift of the Holy Spirit cannot be purchased (the sin of Simony, after Simon the Wizard who tried to purchase it from St. Peter), it seems clear from Matthew 20 that it cannot be earned either. The gift of the Holy Spirit is, well, a gift. We become responsible for how we use that most precious gift, but the gift itself is free. Having received the Holy Spirit, we must cooperate with the Spirit, and if we cooperate, we will do good works and bear good fruit. Salvation, however, is from the Spirit of Jesus, and not from the good works themselves. There is, of course, some merit in cooperating with the Spirit of Jesus. Still the first thing is receiving the Spirit through Faith.

The Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard shows how generous God is. Those who have labored from the first hour are paid the same as those who only signed on at the eleventh hour. The crucial thing is that they signed on. The crucial thing is that someone, before the end, comes to have Faith in the goodness and mercy of God, poured out through Jesus Christ. Since Salvation is given as a gift and not earned, eleventh hour faith is enough. There remains, however, an absolute obligation to use that eleventh hour well, cooperating with Jesus' Spirit and doing whatever good works one can. Salvation is the work of Jesus Christ alone. We do have the duty and privilege, however, of joining ourselves to His saving work through our deeds.

Salvation is given through Faith and not earned, because God's ways are not the world's ways. The Lord Jesus' teaching on Marriage in chapter 19 of Matthew also shows that God's ways are not the world's ways. God means for the normal fulfillment of human sexual desire to be the one flesh union of one man and one woman in Marriage, for their mutual upbuilding and for the procreation and education of children. The world, down through weary ages, has offered many other plans of sexuality, but they have always failed and will always fail. In the end, God's ways work better than the world's ways, even in this world. The normal healthy fulfillment of human sexual desire is the one flesh union of one man and one woman in Marriage, for their mutual upbuilding and for the procreation and education of children. Jesus

wants this union to be for life. The Lord Jesus does recognize that some apparent marriages are “Porniea” (“Uncleanness” in Greek), should never have been engaged in, are not truly from God, and therefore are not binding for life. Jesus nonetheless insists, with divine authority, that the man and woman whom God has truly joined in Faith and Love cannot legitimately be separated by even the highest human authorities. Even Jesus’ own disciples were startled by His teaching. Even to quite humanly decently worldly people, a one flesh union of man and woman for life seems impossible; but God’s ways are not the world’s ways, and with God all things are possible. With God’s Grace, a man and a woman can remain united and faithful for life.

With God all things are possible, including religious virginity for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven. The world does not believe that human sexual desire can be disciplined in that way, but the world is wrong. In chapter 19 of Matthew, the Lord Jesus makes it clear that some Christians are called to religious virginity for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven, just as some are called to Christian Marriage for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven. The sacred celibacy of consecrated religious and ordained priests must be kept carefully distinct from any kind of bachelorhood. Sacred celibacy is given as a gift for the service of God and for His people. For me personally, the bridge between celibacy and service is singing the Divine Office, the Liturgy of the Hours, in the course of each day’s routine. That devotion, built around the Bible’s Psalms, keeps me focused on Jesus Christ as the source and true meaning of religious celibacy.

From marriage, to celibacy, and then to children, God’s ways are not the world’s ways. Jesus makes that clear in Matthew 19. The world reluctantly puts up with children, non earners and non producers who make a lot of noise and are disturbingly unpredictable. The world puts up with them, but never really likes them. Jesus, on the other hand, really likes children. He even suggests that if we want to learn what Heaven will be like, we should look at children at play, not in childish rebellion but at childlike play. Their innocence, openness, and trust as they play truly reflect, albeit from a distance, the qualities of Heaven. The world does not take children seriously, but wise people, like the heroine of the classic movie “Night of the Hunter”, knows how tough children really are. “Children endure”, and they endure because of Heaven’s qualities of innocence, openness, and trust.

The childlike endure. The merely tough and practical do not. The world honors the “self made” rich but Jesus does not. Being tough and practical are not bad things, but being ONLY tough and practical is catastrophic for Salvation. Salvation requires that toughness be mixed with Love and that practicality be mixed with Faith and Hope. Otherwise, the person who builds up riches through tough practicality only kills his soul. It is easier, suggests the Lord in Matthew 19, for a camel to pass through a needle’s eye than for the practical and successful man without Faith, Hope, and Love, to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Anyone can be saved by God’s gift, but it takes Faith to recognize the gift and Hope and Love to use it.

Taken together, chapters 19 and 20 of Matthew show us that God’s ways are better than the world’s ways, that He offers Salvation to all before anyone does a thing to earn it, that those who receive Salvation through Faith have a solemn obligation to live that Salvation in this world through good works, that those good works are often expressed in Christian Marriage and Celibacy, and that all Christian vocations need to be lived out in a spirit of childlike innocence, openness, and trust.