

# 25<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Year

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The landowner in today's parable would not fare very well in the field of industrial relations today! In the world of work people are very sensitive to issues of equality, the respecting of differentials and so on. Just think of the recent controversy over payments to high profile presenters in the BBC. Justice and fairness are broader concepts than the simple fulfilment of what is due by contract. All sorts of arguments could be made by those seeking to base social policy on the Lord's teaching – from a complete free market to Marx's "from each according to his ability, to each according to his need"!

However, this would miss the point of the parable. Jesus is not teaching economic or social theory. He is speaking about the Kingdom of Heaven. Today's parable conveys the same message as that of the Prodigal Son in St Luke's Gospel. You cannot be more or less a son or daughter of God. There are no second class members of God's family or citizens in God's kingdom. God's love fills us the extent that we are capable of receiving it. That fullness of God's love brings us all we truly need. In the story of the Prodigal Son the older brother, who stayed at home was jealous and resentful. He felt he had missed out because the father made such a fuss of his brother and restored him to his place, but the father reminded him: "you are always with me and all I have is yours." A denarius is a day's wage – enough to support a man and his family – all that he needs in material terms. Those who work all day have all they need. The landowner does not want those who start late to be unable to support their family. They too receive all they need.

The reward that God's love brings us is to enjoy his company for ever. This is a gift that cannot be measured. Does this mean it is a waste of time being a faithful son or labouring all day in God's vine yard? Why not do our own thing and just come back to the Lord at the last minute? A negative, purely prudential, motive is that we do not know how long we have and cannot be sure that we will have time to turn back to the Lord, or that, when the time comes, we will be rightly disposed. This is the motivation proposed by Isaiah in our first reading. On Calvary two thieves hung next to Jesus, but only one turned to him!

However, there is a much more positive reason. The faithful son enjoys his father's company and blessing all those years that his brother is away from home. But for the return of the prodigal he would have been contented. The workers in the vineyard would have been content if the landowner had not taken on anyone else, or had paid them less.

By keeping God's company throughout our lives we become more sensitive to his presence. The grace of his presence expands our generosity and opens our hearts to receive his love more fruitfully. Parents love their children and try to be fair to them, but they also love them as individuals and the nature of the relationship will reflect that individuality. Some may be closer than others. If you fill a pint mug and a wine glass, which contains more? The wine glass could not take what is in the pint mug but it is as full as it can be. Which is better – a small flower or a large one? Both beautify God's garden but in different ways.