

## The dignity of work, and the mercy of God

The parable that we have just listened to is an important and interesting one. At the outset, we see a landowner going to hire some labourers for his vineyard. This gives us an insight into the way in which labour was hired in ancient times. The workers gathered in the marketplace and the landowners came out to hire them for a day or a week or a month or a year. This method of hiring labour continued in many rural areas right into the last century.

Nowadays we have more sophisticated means of providing work for people. They go to the labour exchange or job centre or to other places that offer work. Their purpose is the same. It is to provide employment for those who want to work. Most people have to work for a living. They earn their bread by the sweat of their brow.

To work is no disgrace, whether we do it to earn a living or to avoid idleness. Jesus Himself was a true working man. He learned a trait from His foster father, St. Joseph, and He worked as a carpenter making articles for household use. No doubt these were sold and the payment received helped to provide the necessities in the home at Nazareth. After the death of St. Joseph, Jesus became the sole breadwinner for Himself and His mother.

Thus, work has been sanctified and given a dignity of its own. The worker today is following in the footsteps of Jesus. The Lord has given a value and a dignity to our work. If we do our work for the greater glory of God, then we should offer Him the best of which we are capable. The work we do doesn't really matter; the intention we have of doing it for God does really matter.

So people today find their work in different ways. The important thing about our work is to offer it to God to use it as a means to further our holiness and our salvation. When we offer our work to God, it is spiritualised. It becomes a source of merit for us. Our Lord says, "We should pray always." How can we do that? Unless to work is to pray. So we offer our work to God by making our morning offering. We offer to Him whatever we do during the day and then that becomes part of our daily offering. It becomes a part of our daily prayer. It becomes a source of merit for us.

So sometimes at work, things might not go so well. We may feel under pressure. We may have a lot of hassle. We may think to ourselves, "This is not a very prayerful situation." We may be covered in dust and think again, "This is not a prayerful situation." All this does not matter if we have offered our day to God in the morning and then whatever we do, no matter what the difficulties our situation is, all our work becomes a prayer, becomes a source of grace for us.

The second part of today's parable sees the landowner paying the workers at the end of the day. And we see that he paid all the workers the same amount, irrespective of the length of time they had worked. If that happened today it would probably give way to an industrial dispute. But, as Isaiah tells us in today's first reading, God's ways are not our ways. The action of the landowner in today's gospel has more to do with generosity than with justice. And an employer today who offers work to the handicapped or somebody with a disability and pays them a full wage is doing a similar thing to what the landowner did in today's gospel.

The workers in the gospel represent all of us. We are working in the Lord's vineyard and which of us will complain if on the day of judgment we receive the same reward as others around us? We may think to ourselves, "They haven't done a great deal for the greater glory of God in their lives." They may have undergone a deathbed confession. Will we complain if they are with us in heaven? We will think to ourselves that we are guilty of a lot of shortcomings, inadequacies, infidelities in our lives, and if it wasn't for the mercy of God we would not be saved either.

And we should think, too, that if we are saved, on the day of our salvation we will be joining in heaven Our Lady and all the Saints, and they will not complain that we are getting the same reward as they have received, because they will be overjoyed that we too are saved. So we could heed the advice of St. Paul when he says to us, "All whatsoever you do in word or in work do all for the greater glory of God." And if we do all for God in all lives, then our salvation is assured. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, amen.