

**Beneficiaries of God's Generosity**      Twenty-fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time/A  
September 24, 2017      5:00 Vigil Mass      Is 55:6-9;      Phil 1:20c-24, 27a;  
**Mt 20:1-16a**      (Being with God for all eternity is a gift that God has created us for, the very purpose of our existence; and he offers it to everyone.)

**“The last will be first, and the first will be last.”**

This parable is one of the more challenging parables in the New Testament. I remember as a boy walking home with my father from church and he said to me, “I suppose you like that parable?” Why he thought I liked it, I don't know, but I was studying at the seminary at the time and I guess that's what he figured.

We have to keep in mind whom Jesus is speaking to. It says very clearly he spoke to his disciples. **There are three basic audiences he has: disciples, teachers of the law, and the crowd.** He doesn't speak the same way anymore than you speak the same way when you speak to your young children or when you speak to your business associates or your spouse. So **Jesus did not speak in the same way, nor even deal with the same matters.** When he spoke to his disciples he is dealing with some more tough, meaty problems. And the tough, meaty problem here is that **the disciples were feeling put upon and maybe even cheated.** And so Jesus told this parable because the disciples didn't quite understand what he was trying to get at, and **didn't quite know where they fit in to his basic plan and work.**

Now what Jesus was always trying to tell everybody, all his audiences, is that **God has a goal to bring everybody into eternal life,** a sense of bliss and communion that is eternal because it is a sharing in God's own being. **That Jesus said to everybody.** St. Paul put it: “God becoming all in all.” Now this gift is really something which is immeasurable and incomparable and unsurpassable, differing from worldly possessions or wealth. But the disciples can't understand this. **They are always trying to measure what they were getting,** the way you might measure how much money you have in the bank, or what the value of your stocks is at the present moment. Just think of James and John and their mother asking for the right and the left hand of Jesus on his throne. They were thinking about what they could get and surpass their brothers. Or remember the Last Supper when **they were arguing about who was the greatest.** This is a matter of measuring.

But being with God and relating to God doesn't work like that. **Being with God for all eternity is a gift that God has created us for, the very purpose of our existence. And he offers it to everyone** regardless of their present life or circumstances, regardless of their choices or accomplishments, **as long as they are willing to accept it.** That is why Jesus told the Pharisees that the prostitutes and the tax collectors were entering the kingdom before them, because they were willing to enter. And this is what is hard for most people to get, including the disciples, that **life with God is not a reward for a good life, and it is not payment that one is due for one's labors.** Life with God is always a gift and cannot be earned.

And yet, and this is the real problem, **Jesus asked his disciples for willingness to do more, to suffer and to witness for his sake.** But they are thinking: why should we? **Why should we do extra if we don't get more?** This is the meaning of Peter's question. “Lord, we have left everything to follow you; what can we expect in return?” This parable is the answer, and most

people have a hard time understanding or rather even accepting the answer, including Peter, James, and John.

So what we have to do is re-understand or **understand in a new way what life is about**. Life is not just for living. We are not put on this earth just to exist nor to survive. **We are put on this earth so that we can have an opportunity to meet God, and to decide to cast our lot with God.** People can be included in the kingdom of God at the last minute of their lives. And yet while that is true, Jesus asks of his disciples for real commitment and real responsibility and even real suffering. So humanly speaking, **the disciples expected more, something extra for the extra burden that Christ was laying on them.** So the grumbling of the workers in the vineyard represents exactly how the disciples were feeling, and Jesus knew it. But the ultimate irony is that how the disciples were feeling wasn't actually true, and that's the whole point of the parable. **They were not the ones who withstood the whole day's work; only Jesus was.** He was the one who came and bore the whole burden of human existence. **They were called in only at the end of the day to work a little bit.** And so when they complained about the generosity of the master they were complaining about the generosity they were being shown. And Jesus' intention was that they would see how foolish they were being. All of us are really beneficiaries of God's generosity.