

St Pius-St Anthony 25th Sunday Ordinary Time Year A

What a parable? Here is a good question? If we all work for this vineyard owner, who wants to be on the tomorrow's morning shift? About the pay issue part or the morale among the shift? But I find two lenses or angles with which to approach this troubling parable to see what Jesus is up to, and to draw great spiritual meaning from Jesus' teaching here.

1) The parable **is about work** or 2) **it is not!**

First, let's assume it is about work. Why would the owner go so overboard in generosity about paying some ½ day workers or even two hour workers, paying them the same wage as the whole day workers? Well, I first want to know how many workers we are talking about in that original work crew? It may not have been very many. For example, if there were only two or three workers in the whole vineyard doing everything, would that change the way we look at it? If there was only one worker, picking grapes, sorting grapes, bagging grapes, carrying them to the trailer and then going back into the rows and starting all over, would that make a difference? I could see how that lightens the burden of the original workers-their job gets easier as more workers come on duty, especially if they are on a deadline? So what if this 'generous' pay, is only an up-front 'bonus', a sign on advance much like a new recruit may get as they initially join the team. I trust this landowner been in business a while and knows that if he ever wants a morning shift again, he won't pull another trick like that: because good luck to him finding anybody at the union hall the next morning looking for vineyard work-word like that spreads fast and I bet no one would line up the next day until noon or later. So, imagine that this owner is building a bigger team of laborers, strengthening his work force by recruiting (incentivizing) new workers (I trust he is offsetting some benefit to later reward his veteran loyal ones).

But also, another condition on the ground that can lead this owner to throw money at a labor shortage is that he knows he has a deadline to meet and that the entire grape harvest has to be on the dock in the morning to be shipped out to buyers, or else, no sale, and no one gets paid. Operating on such a deadline calls for drastic incentives to get people to show up (again the veterans will be rewarded later). Or what if he knows that a storm is raging toward them and to salvage any harvest at all, everything has to be out of the field that day or it is lost. That will motivate you. I sure know that I have thrown extra resources at a problem as a deadline approaches quickly. For example, what are you willing to pay extra for that spare part to get the tractor back to running and finish today's work **today**, or do you wait until

next week and get it free shipping, saving a little money, but losing the early harvest, the market saturates with your product and you have low/no sales. I think most would pay a little more to keep on time, and finish the job. So, if Jesus' parable lesson is about work, there is good reason to act the way this owner does, to grow his worker pool and thrive in the grape business (again I trust he knows his workers.)

But secondly, what if this parable isn't about work-when we mean work as a dreaded thing to avoid. What I suggest here, is reflected in this story of a dialogue I went through the other day? I went to get gas at the corner quick stop. I ran into a guy I knew and said, "Hey, you won't believe who I just saw, I just bought a bicycle from Rick and he said he worked with you at the garage?" The guy said back, "Oh, is that what Rick calls what he does?" Maybe this Rick is too laid back (free-loading?) for you to want to be on his same shift. Or from the other side of it, I know a guy who swears to this--He tells me a lot "I've never worked a day in my life". It is not work to him: he means that his heart is so much into what he does, that even the long days of overtime are not work to him because ***he loves what he does.*** He finds fulfillment in his work and labors with love not counting it as '*something he had to do*' but something he loves to do--he is that into it! In such cases, what happens in this parable is that the true motives of the veteran workers are exposed. Are they only part of the team for the pay? Is there nothing fulfilling and satisfying about their work? Keep in mind that the true clue to this parable's meaning comes from Jesus himself when he says, "The ***kingdom of heaven is like*** a landowner who went out at dawn.." (20:1). That tells me this parable is about way more than workers' rights or a just wage. It is the ***kingdom of heaven*** we are talking about (what do they say about working in the kingdom, 'its benefits are out of this world!') But knowing that this is not just any vineyard, but the vineyard of God, certainly reorients my perspective about what Jesus is saying. This work is so life giving and important, saving of me and other--that the work itself is pay! I don't want anything for it. I am just glad to be counted on the team. To just be in the vineyard working, I am happy! So, I will close with this story that can invite us to see our work as so much more than just about today, or about some pay. It is told about three guys who have to pass through the town gate and they all look alike but something very different is going in their lives. The first guy pushes a wheel barrow of bricks into town and is stopped at the gate and asked, "What's your business here?" He said, "Doing what I am told, I am taking these ridiculously heavy bricks into town and leaving them at the corner of 2nd and main." Guard says, "Okay pass

through". Then a second guy with a wheelbarrow of bricks showed up and is asked, "What's your business here?" He says, "I'm working for the weekend & getting ready to take off on vacation, I just have to deliver these blocks first." Guard says, "Okay pass." Then a third guy shows up with a wheel barrow full of bricks and he is also stopped and asked the same, "What's your business?" and He says so excitedly with enthusiasm (as if he was the architect/designer) "I am building a cathedral!" Right there is the worker that the vineyard owner is looking for! Or the worker for the Kingdom that Jesus is seeking. The difference is how we look at what we are doing, and who we are working for-that makes all the difference in the parable of the kingdom. It is not the pay, not the hours, not the other workers, but that fact that the owner has called us, given us a place in the line and lets us be part of the great harvest. The joy of being part of this lifesaving work and that the owner-God is going to take care of his faithful and joyful laborers. So the question to mediate on or reflect over may be "Which worker am I?"