



Bringing Home the Word

Twenty-Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time | September 24, 2017

God's Payment to Us

By Mary Katharine Deeley

When I was a child, family allowances were pegged to age. The older we were, the more we got, reflecting our growing responsibility in doing household chores. If we did extra, we got extra—it was as simple as that. Complaints were few, and we waited in great anticipation for the day allowances were handed out.

Because of that experience, I feel some sympathy for the workers in today's readings who worked all day only to find they'd receive what the latecomers got. I certainly wouldn't have thought it fair if my fourteen-years-younger sister had gotten the same allowance I did!

But, as Isaiah so gently reminds us, God's ways are not ours.

God's wages cannot be measured in dollars. Grace, freedom, mercy, and love are the payment God renders for our willingness to work in his vineyard. These things cannot be divided because God is not stingy or miserly. Nor can they be earned, for they are gifts. God gives his gifts wholly and freely to all who turn to him.

Think of it this way: Does God give less grace or freedom to the adult who is baptized at thirty than to the thirty-year-old who was baptized as an infant? The question makes us laugh—of course not.

It is very much like us to want our fair share, and we've become accustomed to earning our wages. It is very like God to want every person to taste the joy and freedom of life in him, and the first step to doing so is simply accepting his invitation.

We might as well start now. †

Sunday Readings

Isaiah 55:6–9

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD.

Philippians 1:20c–24, 27a

I long to depart this life and be with Christ, for that is far better.

Matthew 20:1–16a

[Jesus said,] "Thus, the last will be first, and the first will be last."

A Word From Pope Francis

Some of you said that this system cannot endure. We must change it. We must put human dignity back at the center and on that pillar build the alternative social structures we need. This must be done with courage but also with intelligence, with tenacity but without fanaticism, with passion yet without violence. And all of us together, addressing the conflicts without getting trapped in them, always seeking to resolve the tensions in order to reach a higher plane of unity, of peace, and of justice. We Christians have...a guide to action...the Beatitudes and the Last Judgment passage.

—Mass and blessing of sacred pallium for new archbishops, Solemnity of Sts. Peter and Paul, June 29, 2016



God's wages to us can't be divided because God is not stingy or miserly.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- What wages do you expect from God?
- Do I treat all people with dignity?



Fairness vs. Generosity

By Gregory F. Augustine Pierce

My three children, now teenagers, have always insisted that my wife and I be fair in our dealings with them. By fair, of course, they mean that we treat them absolutely equally.

“That’s not fair,” they point out with great regularity when one of them gets something the others didn’t: “He got to eat out and I didn’t. She got to stay out late and I had to come home early.” These minor injustices seem to be the ultimate in unfairness to them.

“Which would you rather have, fairness or generosity?” I often ask them. For many years they consistently chose fairness, but lately they have begun to consider the positive aspects of generosity.

There are many. For one thing, fairness implies a minimal, lowest-common-denominator kind of arrangement. If each child has to have exactly the same amount of everything—money, time, attention—then it seems that all parents can do is dole out their resources with one eye on the balance scale and the other on the bottom line.

Generosity, on the other hand, allows for the spontaneous gesture, the extravagant expenditure, the once-in-a-lifetime experience. Generosity is more fun, exciting, and unexpected

than fairness—and therefore more interesting. Fairness, on the other hand, is predictable, uninspiring, and subject to a lot of boring record-keeping.

At work, too, most of us would settle for simple fairness. There is so much injustice, inequality, lying, and cheating in the workplace that the idea of a fair wage or an evenhanded employer has great appeal.

Operating by New Rules

Consider a job where fairness was assumed and generosity was the goal. In such an environment, “How generous can we afford to be?” would be the driving force. Rather than minimizing salaries or benefits, employers would try to find ways to share with employees whatever wealth or profit was available. Customers would not be asked to pay the maximum the market would bear for minimum-quality products. Parties in negotiation would not try to win the best deal possible for themselves but would attempt to fashion win-win situations for all involved.

“That’s ridiculous,” you might say. “That’s not the way the world works.” But today’s parable of the workers in the vineyard suggests that generosity is the way God would have things. In describing God’s reign, Jesus told the story of the workers who were hired at

various times of the day and yet were paid the same.

Just as my children did earlier, the workers who were hired early in the day complained that the owner was not being fair. He pointed out, however, that each of them had been paid a just wage—one they had agreed to—but that he was free to be generous. “Are you envious because I am generous?” he asked.

Exactly. Many of us think that fairness is the best that we can get, and we’re not eager to give generosity a try.

Living the Kingdom—Now

But God’s reign is supposed to be “on earth as it is in heaven,” as Jesus prayed in the Our Father. That means that the way things are in heaven—in this case, generosity over fairness—is the way things should also be on earth. If we want the reign of God in our families and workplaces, then we must at least try to operate this world by the rules of the next, where “the last will be first, and the first will be last.”

That’s very lucky for all of us because, as my friend Fr. Bill Burke has observed, “We were all hired at five in the afternoon.” †



Lord, I am grateful for the gift of your compassion. Help me to be more generous in sharing your compassion with others. Amen.

From *Grateful Meditations for Every Day in Ordinary Time*

Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

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WEEKDAY READINGS

September 25–30

Mon. Weekday:
Ezr 1:1–6 / Lk 8:16–18

Tue. Weekday:
Ezr 6:7–8, 12b, 14–20 / Lk 8:19–21

Wed. St. Vincent de Paul:
Ezr 9:5–9 / Lk 9:1–6

Thu. Weekday: Hg 1:1–8 / Lk 9:7–9

Fri. Sts. Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael:
Dn 7:9–10, 13–14 or Rv 12:7–12a / Jn 1:47–51

Sat. St. Jerome:
Zec 2:5–9, 14–15a / Lk 9:43b–45