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Today and the next couple of Sundays are called the 'Gesima' Sundays. Septuagesima, Sexagesima, and Quinquagesima are the pre-Lenten Sundays whose names mean seventy, sixty, and fifty days 'till Easter. We may think of these three Sundays as preparation before we dive into Lent on Ash Wednesday. The Church would have us to be prepared for Lent, to take Lent seriously, and to have spent time in prayer discerning what God is leading us to do or not do, as we contemplate a Lenten fast or discipline. This little season also lends itself to the themes of Faith, Hope and Love. Faith, Hope, and Love or Charity, the three cardinal virtues which every Christian is called to possess. We remember that the greatest of these virtues is Love, which St. Paul says, *if I have not love than anything else I do is worth nothing*. It is a good lesson for us, too, as we prepare ourselves for the journey of Lent to Easter, that regardless of what we decide to take on or give up for Lent, we must have faith, hope, and love, and if we do not have love then our Lenten fast will have no spiritual benefit.

This week we are presented with the parable of the Vineyard in which we find the theme of faith. In this parable we see a householder, the owner of the vineyard, go out and hire laborers and agreed to pay them a denarius, or a day's wage. These go off to work in his vineyard. We can surmise that the householder had a rather large vineyard, as he goes out a second, third, and fourth time to hire laborers agreeing to pay each group a day's wage. The householder even goes out and hires those at the eleventh hour, the very last hour of the day, agreeing to pay them a day's wage along with everyone else. Make no mistake about it, the householder, the owner of the vineyard, is our Lord and we are the hired laborers. Regardless of when we begin to work in His vineyard, He promises to pay us all the same, the wages of Everlasting Life. There are no tricks up His sleeves. The Lord shows this when at the end of the day the groups of laborers come to get their pay and the group who had toiled all day long were surprised and upset that the group who had worked only an hour in the vineyard were still paid the same amount.

Now in Biblical times there were no fair employment laws and these laborers were most likely subsistence workers. They got paid at the end of each day, they had no political power, and they had no time to unionize. But demand higher pay and fair treatment they did. It must be pointed out too that in Biblical days, day laborers would not deign to speak to the householder so rudely if they ever wanted to be employed by him again. But this really isn't the moral of the parable. The moral of the parable is that the first group of laborers did not have faith in the householder to be a fair and just employer. The householder made good on His

word, He promised that if they worked they would get a day's wage. The same is true for those who came and worked for one hour. To this last group the householder definitely proved his faithfulness. The arrangement sounded too good to be true, work one hour for a day's salary, and indeed they were paid the full salary. To that first group who questions the Lord's fairness, He asks them *do you begrudge my generosity?* The first group of workers expected the Lord to pay by the world's standards. Yet even after being rudely questioned, He still pays the first and last groups what was agreed. He teaches them to have faith in both His mercy and His generosity.

We see this same theme of Faith in the epistle, why does St Paul continue to "run the race?" The argument could be made that St. Paul was not as important because He was called to be an Apostle at a later hour. He was not in that first group of Disciples and Apostles who toiled away the whole day long. Yet after being called into the Lord's vineyard, he busily sets to work preaching the Gospel and working in his own vineyard. He cooperates with God's grace, and so he teaches himself discipline. He even braves stoning, imprisonment, shipwreck, even being lowered in a basket to escape those who would put him to death. Why does St. Paul do this? Because he has complete and undying faith in what our Lord had called him to preach. He has complete and undying faith in our Lord's generosity of Grace, even though he has come to the Vineyard at *the eleventh hour*.

Do we have faith to trust in God's mercy and generosity? We have been called into the Lord's vineyard and we are expected to do the work God has called us to, and not to worry about our rewards or the rewards of others. We are required to work for God literally on good faith, to take Him at His word, to trust in His promise that we will be rewarded justly and righteously. We learn that there is no competition for greater rewards or higher salaries in the Kingdom of Heaven. If that first group of workers had the Love of God in their hearts, they would not have been upset to see those who worked only one hour receive the same pay. Would we be upset to see the new convert to Christianity receive the crown of Everlasting Life along with those of who have been devout Christians their entire lives?

The reward we trust to receive is the day's wage God has promised as His Grace crowns the faithful and thankful with Everlasting Life. To complete this race and the work laid out for us requires faith and love. We must have that faith that persists and keeps on going, to continue the work, and love to move us to encourage all who labor in the vineyard regardless of the hour of the day. Let us continue our work, and encourage each other along the way, placing all of our faith in Jesus Christ and His grace and mercy. Amen.