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The Twenty-fifth Sunday of the Year (A)

Today our common perception of the world is challenged. The prophet Isaiah tells us that God does not think as we do (Isaiah 55:8); Saint Paul tells us that death is life (Philippians 1:21); and Jesus tells us not to look at what others have (cf. Matthew 20:15). Taking these three together it is clear that we must change the way we see the world.

Looking out onto the world, what do you see? Where is your focus? To what is your gaze and attention drawn?

There are many today who live each day thinking only of this life and of what they can get out of it. Life is for the taking, they say, yet the more they grab the more they want and the unhappier they become.

Do we not all do this, at least from time to time? Do we not keep our eye fixed on the things of this world, forgetful that this life prepares us for the next? It is this view of the world - our constant focus on this life - that we must change.

To our thinking the parable of the workers in the vineyard is unjust. It is not fair to pay people equal wages for unequal work, we say. And yet this is precisely what Jesus says happens. What is he trying to tell us here?

If the purpose of this parable is to show us that the Lord gives equally to all, if it is one meant for encouragement, why do we find it so disconcerting?

If the Lord were simply handing out money in the parable what he does may well be unjust, even though all of the workers did agree to the same wage. But the One who tells this parable is the same One who tells his disciples to "carry no money bag," so we know that he cannot here be referring to money (Luke 10:4).

What, then, is this "usual daily wage," this *denarius*, that the Lord gives us? It is "neither silver nor gold," (Acts 3:6) but the gift of the Spirit that perfects us and leads us to eternal life. The Lord calls all people to receive this grace of the Spirit at the same time, but we answer at different times because of the choices we make and the way in which we see the world.

In Greek, Jesus asks, "η ο οφθαλμος σου πονηρος οτι εγω αγαθος ειμι" (Matthew 20:15)? "Is your eye wicked because I am good?" What does he mean?

Why did those laborers in the vineyard grow envious of those hired after them? It was because of their wicked eyes. They were not content with what the Lord gave them and thought themselves better and more deserving than those hired after them. Their jealousy turned their eye to wicked glances. My

brothers and sisters, is any of us more deserving of the Lord's grace than another? Of course not! "Indeed, we must all rejoice exceedingly to be even the last in the kingdom of God," because none of us deserves Paradise!¹

The fact that we often grow upset when we consider that those who convert on their deathbed receive the same grace as us is a sign that our love is not yet sincere, that we do not yet appreciate the Lord's mercy toward us. If we did, we would desire that mercy to be shared with every person.

The challenge before us today, the question the Gospel poses to us, is this: "whether the first ones, who were righteous and pleased God and who shone brightly from their labors through the whole day, at the end are possessed by the lowest vice, envy and jealousy."² Notice that envy and jealousy can bring our good works to nothing.

Our eye grows wicked through envy and jealousy as we look to what others have been given and when we consider ourselves more deserving than they. This is what Jesus means when he asks, "Is your eye wicked because I am good?" Are we jealous because "the LORD is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness" (Psalm 145:8)? Are we envious because "the LORD is good to all and compassionate toward all his works" (Psalm

¹ Saint Gregory the Great, *Forty Gospel Homilies*, 19.4. In *ibid.*, 111.

² Saint John Chrysostom, *The Gospel of Matthew*, Homily 64.3. In *ibid.*, 111.

145:9)? Do we look around, envious of his generosity? If we do, it is because we see the world improperly.

Writing to the Church at Philippi, Paul tells us that he is torn between two great desires, that of dying and that of living. He says,

And I do not know which I shall choose. I am caught between the two. I long to depart this life and be with Christ, for that is far better. Yet that I remain in the flesh is more necessary for your benefit (Philippians 1:22-24).

Paul goes on to say, "Convinced of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith" (Philippians 1:25).

The Apostle knows the Lord has given him a work to do and because he does this work he says, "Christ will be magnified in body, whether by life or by death" (Philippians 1:20). Would that each of us could say these words! Paul knows his task and he sets to it as the "good and faithful servant" (Matthew 25:23).

The Lord Jesus has indeed given each of us a task to do, a work to undertake, whether it be as a husband or wife, a mother or father, a child, a student or priest or professed religious. We are all workers in the Lord's vineyard, though some of us perform our work better than others.

Pope Saint Gregory the Great reminds us, "All voices shout, 'Christ,' but not everyone's life shouts it. Many follow God

with their voices but flee from him with their conduct."³ More than our voices, our very lives must shout Christ so that he will be magnified in us.

Christ has called each of us "to do not merely what pertains to our own benefit but to do what pertains to the glory of God."⁴

Do you want to be happy? Then follow the example of Saint Paul and live not for your own sake but for the sake of Christ.

Do you want to be free? Then follow the example of Saint Paul who lived not as his own master but as a servant of the Lord.

If we look at life with a wicked and jealous eye, the example of Paul seems ridiculous. But if we stop, even for a moment, and look at Paul with a good eye we know that he lived rightly.

If we seek happiness in this life and in the next, we must work as laborers in the Lord's vineyard because "from him we come, by his own power we are created, and to him we return."⁵

At the end of each day, let each of us echo the words of that servant in another parable: "We are unprofitable servants; we have done what we were obliged to do" (Luke 17:10). Amen.

³ Saint Gregory the Great, *Forty Gospel Homilies* 19.5. In *Ibid.*, 112.

⁴ *Incomplete Work on Matthew*, Homily 34. In *ibid.*, 108.

⁵ Saint Ambrose, *On Abraham* 2.5.22. In *ibid.*, 218.