



1) Opening prayer

God our Father,
may we love you in all things and above all things
and reach the joy you have prepared for us
beyond all our imagining.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 20,1-16

Jesus said to his disciples: 'Now the kingdom of Heaven is like a landowner going out at daybreak to hire workers for his vineyard. He made an agreement with the workers for one denarius a day and sent them to his vineyard.

Going out at about the third hour he saw others standing idle in the market place and said to them, "You go to my vineyard too and I will give you a fair wage." So they went. At about the sixth hour and again at about the ninth hour, he went out and did the same. Then at about the eleventh hour he went out and found more men standing around, and he said to them, "Why have you been standing here idle all day?" "Because no one has hired us," they answered. He said to them, "You go into my vineyard too."

In the evening, the owner of the vineyard said to his bailiff, "Call the workers and pay them their wages, starting with the last arrivals and ending with the first." So those who were hired at about the eleventh hour came forward and received one denarius each. When the first came, they expected to get more, but they too received one denarius each. They took it, but grumbled at the landowner saying, "The men who came last have done only one hour, and you have treated them the same as us, though we have done a heavy day's work in all the heat."

He answered one of them and said, "My friend, I am not being unjust to you; did we not agree on one denarius? Take your earnings and go. I choose to pay the last comer as much as I pay you. Have I no right to do what I like with my own? Why should you be envious because I am generous?"

Thus the last will be first, and the first, last.'

3) Reflection

- Today's Gospel presents a parable which is found only in Matthew's Gospel. It is not in the other Gospels. Like in all parables, Jesus tells a story about daily elements, daily things of the life of the people. He presents a picture of the social situation of his time, in which the auditors recognize themselves. But, at the same time, in the story of this parable, there are things which never take place in the reality of the life of the people. And this, because speaking about the master, Jesus thinks about God, about his Father. And this is why in the story of the parable; the master does things which are surprising which never take place in the daily life of the auditors. But, in this strange attitude of the master, it is necessary to find the key to understand the message of the parable.
- Matthew 20, 1-7: The five times that the landowner goes out to look for labourers. "The Kingdom of Heaven is like a landowner going out at daybreak to hire workers for his vineyard. He made an agreement with the workers for one denarius a day and sent them to his vineyard". This is how the story begins and it speaks for itself and does not need too many comments. In what follows, the landowner goes out four times to call other workers to go and work in his vineyard. Jesus refers to the terrible lack of work at that time. Now some details of the story: (a) the landowner himself goes out personally five times to contract workers. (b) When he contracts the workers, he fixes the salary only for the first group: one denarius a day. To those of nine o'clock in the morning he says: I will give you what is just, fair. With the others, he does not fix anything. He contracted them only to work in the vineyard. (c) At the end of the day, when it was the time to pay the workers, the landowner orders the administrator to carry out this service.
- Matthew 20, 8-10: The strange way of fixing the accounts at the end of the day. When it was evening, the landowner of the vineyard told his administrator: Call the workers and pay them, beginning from the last ones to the first ones. Here, at the time of drawing the accounts, something strange takes place, which does not happen in normal life. It seems that things are inverted. The administrator begins to pay those who were contracted just an hour before. The salary is the same for all: one denarius as it was agreed with the first ones who were contracted at the beginning of the day. When the first came, they expected to get more but they too received one denarius each. Why does the landowner act like that? Would you do the same? It is precisely in this surprising gesture of the landowner that the key of understanding this parable is hidden.
- Matthew 20, 11-12: The normal reaction of the workers before the strange attitude of the landowner. The last ones also receive their salary as those who were contracted first. The story says that these began to grumble against the landowner and said: "The men who came last have done only one hour and you have treated them the same as us, though we have done a heavy day's work in all the heat". This is the normal reaction of a good sense. I think that all of us would have had the same reaction and would have said the same thing to the landowner. Would we have not?
- Matthew 20, 13-16: The surprising explanation of the landowner who gives the key of the parable. The response of the landowner is the following: "My friend, I am not being unjust to you. Did we not agree on one denarius? Take your earnings and go. I choose to pay the last comer as much as I pay you; have I no right to do what I like with my own?"

Why should you be envious because I am generous?" These words give the key which explains the attitude of the landowner and indicates the message which Jesus wants to communicate to us: (a) The landowner was not unjust, because he acts according to what he had agreed with the first group of workers: one denarius a day. (b) It is the sovereign decision of the landowner to give to the last ones the same amount that he had agreed upon with those of the first hour. These do not have the right to complain and claim anything. (c) Acting with justice, the landowner has the right to do the good that he wants with the things that belong to him. The worker, on his part has this same right. (d) The last question touches on the central point: Why should you be envious because I am generous? God is different and his thoughts are not our thoughts (Is 55, 8-9).

- The background of the parable is the circumstance of the time, for Jesus as well as for Matthew. The workers of the first hour are the Jewish People, called by God to work in his vineyard. They bear the weight of the day, from Abraham to Moses, for over one thousand years. Now at the eleventh hour, Jesus calls the pagans, the gentiles to work in his vineyard and they succeed in having the preference in the heart of God. "Thus the first ones will be last and the last will be first".

4) Personal questions

- Those of the eleventh hour arrive, they have advantages and receive priority in regard to entrance into the Kingdom of God. When you wait in line for two hours, and a person arrives, and without saying anything she places herself before you. Would you accept this? Can these two situations be compared?
- God's action surpasses our calculations and our human way of acting. He surprises us and some times is uncomfortable. Has this happened to you in your life? What lessons have you drawn from this?

5) Concluding Prayer

Kindness and faithful love pursue me every day of my life.

I make my home in the house of Yahweh

for all time to come. (Ps 23,6)