

Commentary to the Twenty-fifth Sunday In Ordinary Time



It Is Never Too Late It certainly seemed like the workers who spent the entire day in the vineyard had a point. It didn't seem just for them to receive the same pay as those who worked a few hours.

After all, they were out in the sun all day, while those other guys only worked in the late afternoon. But the owner of the vineyard also had a point. He had made an agreement with each group as he called them to work in his vineyard. He did not violate his agreement with the first group by being so generous to the last group.

Nor was the Lord being unfair to his closest followers when He said to the man dying on the cross next to Him, the man we call Dismis, "This day you shall be with me in paradise." Dismis didn't follow the Lord throughout Galilee and Judea. He didn't leave his family and friends. He didn't sleep outside when lodging couldn't be found. Instead, Dismis was busy stealing from people. While Jesus' first followers were striving to be good people, Dismis was refining his skills as a thief. Was it fair that He should be rewarded with heaven when all he did was make a profession of faith moments before his death? Yes, it was fair.

God's gracious gift to Dismis did not replace the gifts he offered those who followed Him from the beginning of His ministry. He might have been just minutes away from his death, but it was not too late for Dismis.

It is never too late with the Lord. This Gospel reading really applies to each of us in two different ways. First of all, it tells us to respect the initial call the Lord gives us. Some of us receive the first call to follow the Lord at our birth. That is the great gift of parents who are determined that their infants and children share in the Life of Christ that is the heart of their family. Some are first called to the Lord at other times in their lives.

That call could be due to anything from a crisis situation where people realize they need God, to a simple inner longing for a happiness that the world cannot give. The call itself is Grace. The Lord gives it to various people, in many ways at many times in their lives. We are often shocked to learn

that others who have behaved one way have now turned to the Lord. We might know of someone who had been antagonistic and sarcastic to all who went to Church. And now, there is that person in the pew in front of you, praying fervently, looking to be active in the Church he had mocked.

We might see someone whom we know has been involved in some very shady dealings. Maybe it is a person who has destroyed his or her family through infidelity. Maybe it is a person who flaunted morality, saying that using drugs was normal, or that getting drunk was expected, or that stealing was part of life, or that destroying the reputation of others was the way to advance in work, in school, etc. And now there is that person in Church.

More than that, there is that person taking an active role in ministry, even leading a ministry. So we ask, "How can that person all of a sudden become so spiritual?" The answer to that question is grace. At the same time that person will be the first one to decry his or her former lifestyle. He knows what they had done was wrong, and he is the first to say that his former lifestyle was not acceptable. He also thanks God that it was not too late for him to go into the fields and work for the Lord. We sing about this all the time. We sing, "Amazing Grace," don't we? St. Augustine is usually pointed towards as the horrible sinner who turned to the Lord. He was immoral to the extreme, even getting a girl pregnant and dumping her.

But he did respond to grace. It was not too late for him to work for the Lord. It is also important that we also remember that St. Augustine and others who answer the call of the Lord were and are ashamed of their past and wish they had not wasted so much of their lives. "Late, have I loved thee, O Beauty, ever Ancient, ever New. Late, have I loved thee," Augustine wrote. I really don't think that he just wrote this. I believe that he sobbed this.

He knew how much time of his life he had wasted. He knew how many people he had hurt. He knew how bad he had been. He knew how much good could he have accomplished, if only he had responded to God's grace earlier. The grace was there for him, but he ignored it. Still, he did eventually turn to God, and he did become one of the greatest leaders in the Church. Now, what if the people of Augustine's time decided that he had nothing to offer the Church, that he was a known sinner and should not be taken seriously? What if they had decided that it was too late to take Augustine seriously?

They would have missed profiting from his gifts. What if we were to do the same thing? What if we were to exclude someone from the warmth of our community because of that person's past? If we were to do that, we would miss that person's gifts to our community, to our Church.

Think about our dear friend Fr. Thomas Hickey, now serving the Church in the Archdiocese of Hartford. Many of you all know that he had been a protestant minister, and a good one at that. You may not have known that back in those days he was pretty vocal in opposing all things Catholic. But then he responded to God's call to become a Catholic himself. What if we as a community had said, "That's great, but you can't take any leadership here.

It's too late for you." If we had done that, not only would we have missed having a great leader in our evangelization and faith formation programs, the Church would have missed having a great priest. This applies not only to those who join the faith, but also to those who return to the faith after falling away,

perhaps for years. And here is the second way the gospel parable applies to us. Christ continually calls us to himself. Salvation is a process, not a one time event. All of us have had times in our lives that we have not been as committed to God as we should have been.

Worse, there have been times in our lives that we have rejected Him. There have been times of sin. But the Lord has not rejected us. It is never too late for the Lord. He continually goes into the marketplaces of our lives and calls us to come and work in His vineyard. It is never too late to do the Lord's work, never too late for those joining the faith, never too late for those returning to the faith, and never too late for you and me to strengthen our witness to Christ.

So, is God unjust for rewarding those who have worked only a short time in the field? No. Is He unjust when He calls us to turn from sin, return to Him and get back to His work? No again. It is never too late for us. And thank God for that. Thank you Lord for your mercy and compassion that you continually extend to each one of us.

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