

Sunday Message

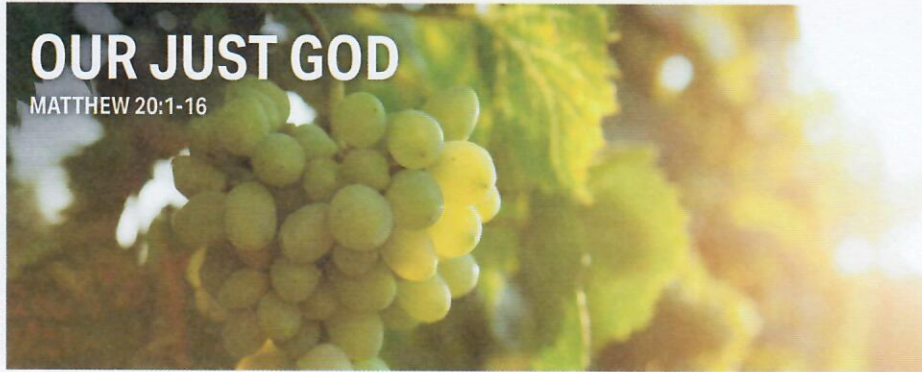
TWENTY-FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

THE WORD

Year A • 20 September 2026 • Psalter Week 1

OUR JUST GOD

MATTHEW 20:1-16



The landowner in today's Gospel story probably needs extra labour to get the grape harvest in. It may reflect something of the economy of Palestine in Jesus' time.

Small family farms had often given way to large holdings, forcing landless workers to hire themselves out for a day's work when they could get it (something that still happens today). They probably congregated in the marketplace or village square at dawn, hoping to be hired for the day. A day's work meant a family could be fed; otherwise, the outlook was bleak.

The landowner goes out to hire five times in the day – at daybreak, the usual time for starting work; mid-morning ('third hour'); noon ('sixth hour'); mid-afternoon ('ninth hour'); and just an hour before sunset ('the eleventh hour'), the end of the working day. The only conversation recorded is with the first and the last groups. To the first, he promises a 'fair wage' (a denarius). With the last group, he doesn't mention a precise wage.

The parable has a surprising ending. It would have been normal to begin by paying those who were hired first. Instead, the landowner tells the foreman to start from the end. Probably to their immense surprise, those hired last are given an entire day's wage. Word probably passed back along the line so that those who had been there since dawn were expecting to receive more. To their disappointment, they got the denarius they had agreed on, even though, as they argued, they had been slaving all day in the heat. The landowner reminds them of their bargain: a denarius for a day's work. He is not being unjust, but why, he asks, should they be jealous if he has chosen to be generous? ■

DO

Look at your life at home and at work. Do you always treat others with justice, compassion and love?

SAY

'Lord, help me to see and treat others the way you see and treat them. Amen.'

PRAY

We are aware of the appalling conditions in which many children and vulnerable adults throughout the world are forced to work. Pray for them today, and for a more just world.



LEARN

God's justice is ruled by generosity and compassion.

All are equal in the eyes of God.

REFLECT

Some people don't like the parable of the Good Employer. It seems unfair, even unjust, that those who had worked since dawn were paid the same amount as those who had worked for only a few hours or less. But the employer isn't being unfair. He has cheated nobody. He has paid them what they were entitled to and what they agreed on – a just wage. Instead, the employer is compassionate. He pays the latecomers a full day's wages because he takes pity on them. He doesn't want them to go hungry. He doesn't want their loved ones to suffer. He wants them to be able to feed their families tomorrow. He knows he's unlikely to become a billionaire if he pays people a day's wages for an hour's work – but he does it anyway. His sense of justice demands that he do it.

Today's Gospel reminds us of God's justice. At the heart of the Old Testament is God's covenant with the people of Israel. God promised them that, if they stuck by him,

he would never abandon them, he would be forever committed to them. God would always lavish his love on them, no matter how often they let God down.

This covenant formed the template for how the people of Israel should live. They were to treat each other with justice because that was the way God had treated them. They were to stand alongside the oppressed because God had stood alongside them when they were oppressed in Egypt. They were to care for the weakest in society, the widow and orphan, because God had cared for them in their distress. By being compassionate, they were simply mirroring God's compassion for them.

Jesus epitomised God's justice. He stood alongside the poor. He identified with the most marginal. He said they would be first in the kingdom of heaven. Justice and compassion informed everything Jesus said and did, and he said it must be the

same with us. We must all have a heart for the weak and oppressed; we must all have a passion for justice.

That's why it's important to make a distinction between charity and justice. I can contribute to charity even if I'm not interested in the causes of poverty and injustice. I can feed the poor without asking why they're hungry. I can pray for asylum seekers without wondering how they ended up in this terrible situation. To imitate God's justice demands more of me than simple charity.

The 1971 Synod of Bishops in Rome declared that action for justice is a constitutive part of the Gospel. It's central to the Gospel, not an addendum to it. Simply being charitable isn't enough to salve my conscience. I must not be content to live in a world where there is a yawning gap between the 'have yachts' and the great many 'have nots'. ■

ENTRANCE ANTIPHON

*I am the salvation of the people, says the Lord.
Should they cry to me in any distress,
I will hear them, and I will be their Lord for ever.*

COLLECT

O God, who founded all the commands of your sacred Law upon love of you and of our neighbour, grant that, by keeping your precepts, we may merit to attain eternal life. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

FIRST READING Isaiah 55:6-9

A reading from the Prophet Isaiah.

Seek the LORD while he may be found;
call upon him while he is near;
let the wicked forsake his way,
and the unrighteous man his thoughts;
let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him,
and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.
For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD.
For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 145(144):2-3. 8-9. 17-18. R. 18a

R: The LORD is close to all who call him.

1. I will bless you day after day,
and praise your name for ever and ever.
The LORD is great and highly to be praised;
his greatness cannot be measured. **R.**
2. The LORD is kind and full of compassion,
slow to anger, abounding in mercy.
How good is the LORD to all,
compassionate to all his creatures. **R.**
3. The LORD is just in all his ways,
and holy in all his deeds.
The LORD is close to all who call him,
who call on him in truth. **R.**

SECOND READING Philippians 1:20c-24, 27a

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Philippians.

Brothers and sisters: Christ will be honoured in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labour for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. Let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

ACCLAMATION BEFORE THE GOSPEL cf. Acts 16:14b

R: Alleluia, alleluia.

Open our hearts, O Lord,
that we may pay attention to the words of your Son.

R: Alleluia.

GOSPEL Matthew 20:1-16

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew.

At that time: Jesus told his disciples this parable, 'The kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house who went out early in the morning to hire labourers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the labourers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And going out about the third hour he saw others standing idle in the market-place, and to them he said, "You go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right I will give you." So they went. Going out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour, he did the same. And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing. And he said to them, "Why do you stand here idle all day?" They said to him, "Because no one has hired us." He said to them, "You go into the vineyard too."

'And when evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, "Call the labourers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last, up to the first." And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius. Now when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more, but each of them also received a denarius. And on receiving it they grumbled at the master of the house, saying, "These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat." But he replied to one of them, "Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what belongs to you and go. I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?" So the last will be first, and the first last.'

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS

Receive with favour, O Lord, we pray,
the offerings of your people,
that what they profess with devotion and faith
may be theirs through these heavenly mysteries.
Through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

COMMUNION ANTIPHON

*You have laid down your precepts to be carefully kept;
may my ways be firm in keeping your statutes.*

Or

*I am the Good Shepherd, says the Lord;
I know my sheep, and mine know me.*

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Graciously raise up, O Lord,
those you renew with this Sacrament,
that we may come to possess your redemption
both in mystery and in the manner of our life.
Through Christ our Lord.

Amen.