



## Matthew 20:1-16

**1** Jesus said to his disciples: 'The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner going out at daybreak to hire workers for his vineyard. **2** He made an agreement with the workers for one denarius a day, and sent them to his vineyard. **3** Going out at about the third hour he saw others standing idle in the market place **4** and said to them, "You go to my vineyard too and I will give you a fair wage." **5** So they went. At about the sixth hour and again at about the ninth hour, he went out and did the same. **6** Then at about the eleventh hour he went out and found more men standing round, and he said to them, "Why have you been standing here idle all day?" **7** "Because no one has hired us," they answered. He said to them, "You go into my vineyard too." **8** 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." **9** So those who were hired at about the eleventh hour came forward and received one denarius each. **10** When the first came, they expected to get more, but they too received one denarius each. **11** They took it, but grumbled at the landowner. **12** "The men who came last," they said, "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." **13** He answered one of them and said, "My friend, I am not being unjust to you; did we not agree on one denarius? **14** Take your earnings and go. I choose to pay the last-comer as much as I pay you. **15** Have I no right to do what I like with my own? Why be envious because I am generous?" **16** Thus the last will be first, and the first, last.'

Other readings: Isaiah 55:6-9 Psalm 144 (145) Philippians 1:20-24, 27

Today's gospel reading is one of the parables of Jesus found only in the Gospel of Matthew. The parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard may give rise to some perplexity. Why does the landowner not pay the labourers according to the hours they have worked?

The parable is an invitation to understand that the ways of God are not bound or limited by human standards. The first reading, from the second part of the Book of Isaiah, is very well chosen to assist our understanding. God says: 'for my thoughts are not your thoughts, my ways not your ways'. God does not act according to the principles of human justice, whereby human beings are repaid according to their actions. God's loving generosity puts such considerations to one side.

The point of the parable is that we cannot demand rewards from God. The gifts which God bestows are always far greater than anything we can merit. We are saved not by our own efforts but by the boundless kindness of God which we gratefully welcome into our lives.

*When has God taught you that the ways of God are different?*

*Is it appropriate to speak of the 'justice' of God?*

*We pray for openness to the things of God, which are beyond our full comprehension.*

*We pray for a spirit of forgiveness and acceptance of others.*