BENEDICTINE SISTERS OF CHICAGO

25th Sunday in OT/Cycle A
St. Scholastica Reunion Mass
September 20, 2026
Sr. Susan Quaintance

Is 55: 6-9
Ps 145: 2-3, 8-9, 17-18
Phil 1: 20c-24, 27a
Mt 20: 1-16a

In the 20 plus years that I had a Saint Scholastica Academy freshman homeroom in 206, I heard a lot of things that remind me of those workers hired first in this parable from Matthew's gospel. Things like: "Why do we have to stand during the senior class song?" "Why do we always get dismissed last?" "Why do we have to eat lunch so early – or depending on the year, so late – or depending on the schedule Bs – so fast?" "Why can't we have Come and Go?" "It's not fair!" You can hear yourself saying it, or something similar, right? Of course you can, no matter where you went to high school or who you are today.

That cry of "It's not fair," whether expressed aloud or grumbled internally, is such a human response. None of us like to see people get more or better than we are. We all understand and sympathize with the workers hired first and who "bore the burden and the day's heat." That's one of the things that makes this parable work so well; we get it.

This time through the story, however, I found myself thinking about the other workers, the ones hired at 9, noon, 3, and especially, the ones hired last. The only people we hear from directly in the first half of the story are those hired at 5:00. Their response to the owner's question about being idle all day – "Because no one hired us" – might especially touch those of us who ever looked for work, unsuccessfully, for an extended period of time. These workers weren't lazy; they wanted to work. But they hadn't been in the right place at the right time, or they'd been delayed, or someone got there ahead of them – who knows? They must have had quite a mix of emotions when 6:00 came, and they were paid first. Excitement at receiving more than they thought they were going to get. Probably some discomfort as they gradually became the brunt of some pretty heavy-duty resentment. Maybe embarrassment at their good fortune. Or, at the very least, confusion about what was going on. They were the last, and they got to be the first.

That's how it is in the Kingdom of God. That's what Jesus is teaching about, remember? "The Kingdom of God is like a landowner . . . "Because I was also a freshman theology teacher for some years, and the Kingdom of God was covered in that curriculum, I know that "living in the Kingdom means a life centered on love of God and love of others." (That's from the text book.) In considering how easy that is to say, and hard it is to do, I kept returning to two qualities that seem critical to develop if we are to build and dwell in the Kingdom: humility and generosity.

It must have been pretty humbling to be those workers hired last. Perhaps they felt, as others certainly did, that they got more than they deserved. They were able to support their families that day, not due to their own merit and effort, but because of the owner's magnanimity. The Rule of Benedict talks about this in Chapter 34, "Distribution of Goods According to Need." In this chapter outlining how community members should be given what they need, and not just the same thing as everybody else, Benedict teaches: "Whoever needs less should thank God and not be distressed, but whoever needs

more should be humble because of his or her weakness, not self-important because of the kindness shown him or her." We're all those workers sometimes. We all need more of something sometimes because we are weak and human and incomplete.

Despite that reality, however, we are called to grow in generosity, in our resemblance to the owner of the vineyard. We must be just, of course, but throughout scripture we learn that that's not enough. One commentary I looked at talked about the boss's "unexpected goodness." That kind of joyful and spontaneous giving is what we are to imitate. The Rule is instructive here, too. In one of the most beautiful parts of the Rule, our monastic founder says that "They [community members – think about all the communities that all of us belong to] should each try to be the first to show respect for the other, supporting with the greatest patience one another's weaknesses of body or behavior." It's the only place in all 72 chapters of the Rule where that superlative –greatest – is used. He goes on to say, "No one is to pursue what he or she judges better for self, but instead what is better for someone else." Crazy talk, right?

Yet that's what the Kingdom of God looks like, and by our baptism, we have the privilege of participating in its creation. The more generous and humble we can become, the better equipped we will be to do that work. When we hear our inner freshman murmuring, "It's not fair," we can console her with the reminder that that's not really what it's about.