

TODAY'S PARABLE IS NOT ABOUT paying a fair wage; it's not about giving just rewards. Today's parable is about God's incredible generosity and love.

ON ONE LEVEL, THE earliest laborers in our parable are the Jewish people, especially the Pharisees, who have been faithful to God for centuries! The late-comers in the parable are the publicans and the sinners, the ones Jesus eats dinner with and is now inviting into the Kingdom of God.

ON A SECOND LEVEL, THE EARLY laborers in the parable are the Jews who have become Christians. The first laborers are the only ones who actually have a contract (a covenant) with the landowner, the Lord, Kyrios, as the Greek text calls him, the word frequently used for God Himself. The Jewish Christians are bitterly resentful of the former idol-worshipping Gentiles among them, who are converting to Christianity and are now being treated as their equals.

BUT GOD'S WAYS ARE NOT OUR ways. His generosity, His love, His compassion are so far above our understanding.

A THIRD WAY OF LOOKING AT today's parable is that we are the earliest laborers, who arrived at 6 a.m. and worked a full twelve hours in the blistering sun. We, who have tried our whole lives to obey the commandments, who come to Mass faithfully.

THE COME-LATELY LABORERS, WHO worked only one hour, are those who have led a life of wanton sex, drugs, alcohol with total disregard for anybody but themselves! At the last hour, they have a death-bed conversion and obtain heaven for all eternity. On some level, do we feel cheated like the earliest laborers do in today's parable?

AND WHAT IF, IN HIS INFINITE Mercy and Compassion, God, at the end of time, decides to pardon everyone in Hell! And one of us winds up living in the heavenly mansion right next door to Osama bin Laden!

ARE WE OKAY WITH THIS?

TODAY'S PARABLE IS SUPPOSED TO shake us up! Today, we rejoice that God's ways are so far above our ways!

TODAY, WE THANK OUR LOVING Father for giving us His Precious Son, the Gentle God-in-the-Flesh born in a stable, the Loving Lamb-on-the-Cross, suffering and dying for our sins.

TODAY, WE THANK OUR LOVING Father for the gifts of faith, of life, of family and friends. For our unique talents, our strengths. We thank Him even for our weaknesses, our struggles, our challenges which may turn out to be, in the end, among our greatest blessings. May we never stop saying, "Thank you."