

**September 24, 2017 Labors in The Vineyard Homily:** Brothers and sisters, there is an unusually compelling scene in the Academy Award winning film *"On the Waterfront"* which dates back to the mid 1950's. The filmmaker's inspiration was a series of articles that turned up in one of our nation's tabloids, *"The New York Sun"*, in the late forties. In the articles local mobsters, who then were in control of the waterfronts in New Jersey and New York were exposed. The mob was heavily involved in illicit activities, such as extortion racketeering and corruption. The union bosses were powerful figures and were the ones who determined who would work and who would be turned away on any given work day.

In the scene longshoremen are standing on a dock on a cold winter's morning, and hoping for a day's work. They are visibly anxious; uncertain if they will be chosen for that day's work. The corrupt union boss and his henchmen seem to take delight in their absolute control over the longshoremen and their uncertain fate. For the workman, failure to find work meant no income to support their families. They were at the mercy of corrupt union officials.

In the parable of the Laborers in the vineyard (Mt.20:1-16), the owner of the vineyard represents God. He is generous and sympathetic to the plight of the agricultural worker, a day laborer. He earned just enough in a day's labor to be able to feed his family. And his work day was twelve hours in the scorching heat. He might be compared to the migrant workers of our own day. The parable suggests that it is the time of the grape crush. The grapes are ripe and must be harvested as soon as possible. We learn that the worker is vulnerable and is dependent each day on a call that may not come. Chronic unemployment was not unknown in the biblical world of Our Lord. The owner's behavior insures that everyone went home that day with the minimum needed for himself and his family. In the Torah, God issues a warning to his people: "There shall be no one of you in need".

What lessons can we derive from today's parable?

First, on the day of his election to the papacy, Benedict XVI introduced himself to the world's faithful as "a simple laborer in the Lord's vineyard". In his profound reflections on today's gospel, he writes, "To be able to work in the Lord's vineyard, to put oneself in his service, to collaborate in his work, is itself a priceless recompense that repays every effort. Yet only those who love the Lord and his Kingdom understand this. Those who instead work only for the pay will never realize the value of this inimitable treasure";

Second, we certainly cannot apply human standards and limit the generosity of God. In the first reading God speaks through the prophet Isaiah, "For my thought are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways." (Is.55:8) Consider the converted tax collector, Matthew, the apostle and evangelist. Because of his disreputable profession, he himself was excluded from the Lord's vineyard. From being last, he found himself first, thanks to God's logic. Someone may be at the end of the line but there is still plenty of room. We are invited in to reap the benefits of the harvest. Even latecomers get the same reward;

Third, The Lord who loves a generous giver loves no less a generous recipient. We can only imagine the profound gratitude of those who were called last and still received a full day's wage. In all likelihood, they were the largely forgotten, the aged and infirmed. God can call us at any hour and we must be ready and grateful to answer his call;

Fourth, When a worker is denied a day's employment, he is, in effect, banished from the his fellow workers. He is isolated. By affording the worker a day's wage, he is restored to the fellowship of workers' and once again enjoys their company.

In the final scene of the aforementioned film, *"On the Waterfront"* all the workers seeking a day's work are invited to enter the plant. No one is excluded. The scene reminds us all of Our Lord's benevolence. His desire is that all who are invited come in to his vineyard. We truly learn what God is like!

Amen!