

- You know...we all have an instinctive fear of death...the great unknown...the great portal through which we all will walk one day. “What’s it like?” we wonder.
- Even atheists often fear death...which may actually belie their faith in their proclaimed atheism. “What if all that Christian stuff is true?”
- WE know, of course, how true it is. It doesn’t really take a lot of investigation to come to that realization...IF one will actually do it.
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- God’s grace cannot NOT but work in everyone’s life. For one thing, we all have His basic law imbued within us at our creation—that which the Church calls “natural law”—basic principles of right and wrong, justice and injustice, morality etc.
- This is really just what is embodied in the 10 Commandments—respecting the Creator, parents, the other person—our neighbor.
- But, secondly...we see in Jesus’ parable today how grace works in the lives of all, for the master of the vineyard comes to each of us innumerable times in our lives to hire us—not for a daily wage, but for eternal life. The “hire” is our acceptance of His call.
- That constant “Help Wanted” ad is our conscience...ever goading us to do what is right, and to avoid the wrong.
- Even those not exposed to Christianity have this prodding of conscience to follow what God has made within us.
- For example, even the most remote tribesmen know that it’s wrong to steal...to commit adultery...to bear false witness, etc.
- We can suppress conscience, but it is always there. I see this in last rites all the time—sins, decades old, finally confessed...the agony of conscience finally cleansed.
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- Doesn’t mean following conscience and God’s Word is always easy; in fact, the faithful Christian is often a “lone ranger” either in our family or in society. I’ve known families who would actually teach their children to steal, to cheat, to get whatever they can by hook or crook.

- It's certainly easier to follow Christ when we keep ourselves in good company...to be with our fellow workers in the field...but even if we have to go it alone, God gives us the grace to do so.
 - This is a challenge not uncommon in our day—not to lie when so many do... not to disparage others while in a group of friends doing just that... not to click on websites or watch shows which exploit men and women's bodies and sexuality—that precious gift in which we become co-creators with God in a new image of Him.
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 - The point of Jesus' parable is simply to show God's unbounded generosity...emphasizing His love for all who sincerely seek His kingdom—whenever they find Him during their lives.
 - God—the vineyard owner—calls everyone one way or the other—even from birth because of that natural law within us, and even those who may never even have heard of Jesus.
 - No person is created simply to be condemned, otherwise, St. Paul could not claim that God “...*desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.*”? (1Tim 2:4)
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 - But God may call us to the harvest at different times and in different ways—perhaps an special prodding of grace.
 - Those who have heard the Gospel of Christ sufficiently are certainly bound to it, for that is the essence and definition of the Good. We are created Good, but it is our own choice to remain in that goodness...or not.
 - For those who have not heard of Christ, they are bound to follow the natural law implanted in their heart at their creation, and to do what they know is right as best they are able.
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- We mustn't bristle at today's parable because of pride, as did the early-hires: “*I'm a cradle Catholic*”, or “*I've been a Catholic or a Christian for decades!?*”

- ...especially when we see persons who have led a less-than-perfect lives and yet have later repented and “come to Jesus” with great enthusiasm. Such jealousies are not good.
- Let us remember the brother in the Prodigal Son parable...angry and jealous of his younger brother who squandered his father’s wealth, and yet returned home repentant to the joy of his father.
- What did the father say to the older brother? *“Son...It was fitting to make merry and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.”* (Luke 15:31-32)
- So rejoice with those who find God whenever they find Him... because many people never do. And rejoice that we are privileged to work in our Father’s vineyard even now.
- Jesus assures us: *“I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.”* (Luke 15:7)...God’s generous mercy overshadowing His justice.
- We are not our competitors in the spiritual life, but rather teammates... or, better yet, family.
- Some run faster...some slower...some may have to stop and walk a while. But our desire should be to get all across the line.
- And leadership is not just getting yourself across the line, but helping and encouraging your teammates along the way.
- That’s the way to look at others who may be struggling in the faith or even in basic morality—not to be superior, not to berate, but to encourage and to support, and to point out the obstacles and dangers in their path.
- They may have to lean on you, but that is what Christianity is—helping others even at our own inconvenience...keeping our eyes fixed on the finish line and trying to help all to reach it.
- That is the leadership to which we are called...to be the *“salt of the earth and the light of the world.”*

Reading 1

[Is 55:6-9](#)

Seek the LORD **while he may be found,**

call him while he is near.

Let the scoundrel forsake his way,

and the wicked his thoughts;

let him turn to the LORD for mercy;

to our God, who is generous in forgiving.

For my thoughts are not your thoughts,

nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD.

As high as the heavens are above the earth,

so high are my ways above your ways

and my thoughts above your thoughts.

Responsorial Psalm

[Ps 145:2-3, 8-9, 17-18](#)

R. (18a) The Lord is near to all who call upon him.

Every day will I bless you,

and I will praise your name forever and ever.

Great is the LORD and highly to be praised;

his greatness is unsearchable.

R. The Lord is near to all who call upon him.

The LORD is gracious and merciful,

slow to anger and of great kindness.

The LORD is good to all

and compassionate toward all his works.

R. The Lord is near to all who call upon him.

The LORD is just in all his ways

and holy in all his works.

The LORD is near to all who call upon him,

to all who call upon him in truth.

R. The Lord is near to all who call upon him.

Reading II

[Phil 1:20c-24, 27a](#)

Brothers and sisters:

Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death.

For to me life is Christ, and death is gain.

If I go on living in the flesh,

that means fruitful labor for me.

And I do not know which I shall choose.

I am caught between the two.

I long to depart this life and be with Christ,
for that is far better.
Yet that I remain in the flesh
is more necessary for your benefit.

Only, conduct yourselves in a way worthy of the gospel of Christ.

Gospel

[Mt 20:1-16a](#)

Jesus told his disciples this parable:

“The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner
who went out at dawn to hire laborers for his vineyard.

After agreeing with them for the usual daily wage,
he sent them into his vineyard.

Going out about nine o’clock,
the landowner saw others standing idle in the marketplace,
and he said to them, ‘You too go into my vineyard,
and I will give you what is just.’

So they went off.

And he went out again around noon,
and around three o’clock, and did likewise.

Going out about five o’clock,
the landowner found others standing around, and said to them,
‘Why do you stand here idle all day?’

They answered, ‘Because no one has hired us.’

He said to them, ‘You too go into my vineyard.’

When it was evening the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman,
‘Summon the laborers and give them their pay,
beginning with the last and ending with the first.’

When those who had started about five o’clock came,
each received the usual daily wage.

So when the first came, they thought that they would receive more,
but each of them also got the usual wage.

And on receiving it they grumbled against the landowner, saying,
‘These last ones worked only one hour,
and you have made them equal to us,
who bore the day’s burden and the heat.’

He said to one of them in reply,
‘My friend, I am not cheating you.

Did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage?

Take what is yours and go.

What if I wish to give this last one the same as you?

Or am I not free to do as I wish with my own money?

Are you envious because I am generous?’

Thus, the last will be first, and the first will be last.”