

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost
September 21, 2014

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We are always surprised when we're told not everyone will like it in God's place! That is one of the truths developed in a book by C.S. Lewis called *The Great Divorce*. In the story Our Lord tells, *the vineyard* is God's place. And the Lord's teaching point is the Kingdom of Heaven is not an earn-as-you-go and pay-your-way-to-get-there system. The problem is this is the only kind of system some people understand.

The laborers in today's gospel were some of those people. It was perfectly *natural* for those who worked all day long to think as they did. But it was still not very *reasonable*. They had agreed to a wage. Just because the landowner gave an equal amount to those who only worked at the end of the day, nobody's pay was docked! Everyone got what was agreed to in the terms of labor.

One of the points is Our Lord's parable is discontented people are generally unreasonable. There may be good cause for discontent. But then so often the discontent itself takes over. The discontented person gets quite beyond reasonable discussion.

In another teaching moment Our Lord Jesus showed what happens when a man does not get into the channel of forgiveness. That means forgiving as he is forgiven. It is a sign he is disconnected when he sees no relationship between the mercy he receives from his superior and the mercy he refuses to give his subordinate. To this man it is all a matter of business. So in the Lord's parable the master returns the relationship to one his servant *does* understand. The master rescinds the mercy and sends the servant to debtors' prison!

In today's parable the laborers *also* misunderstand the master. They think he is a plain businessman who is only interested in getting the job done. They are not satisfied with wages even though they had agreed to them. Rather than praise the master's generosity to others they complain and demand more for themselves. After all, they had gotten the job done. So here too the master returns to a relationship they understand: strictly business. "You agreed for a penny; take it and go."

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Almighty God does not need us to do anything! His motive for involving us in His work is for *our* good, not His. He isn't worried the sun is setting and the job might not be finished! If He were, He'd tell the sun to stop in its course as He once famously did at Gibeon. Nor does God hire more laborers at the end of the day to finish what He cannot do Himself! Rather, He hires souls in order to bring *them* under His protection. Serving the Lord opens us to grace. So to that end Our Heavenly Father will grab *anyone* who will come, and it makes no difference whether it is early or late in the day. That, says Jesus, is Divine generosity. And if some people have a problem with that then perhaps they are headed for another kingdom!