

## A season of parables

I invite you to listen especially carefully to this Sunday's parable of the workers in the vineyard. The vineyard is a common Old Testament image to signify the people of Israel. While this parable may not be intended as a model for industrial relations, or as a model for negotiations between management and workers, it does tell us two things.

### THE LORD OF THE VINEYARD



Firstly, and most importantly, it tells us that we rely on God for the good things, including life, that he has given us, and which we could never deserve on merit; and secondly, it shows us that it would surely be a strange God who only gave us what we deserved, because whatever we were repaid for any virtue we might suppose we possess, would fall very far short of the gift of life itself; such repayment would be woefully inadequate to our needs, and it is our needs rather than our desires that God has in mind in his dealings with us.

Some Gospel scholars see in this parable something in common with that of the two sons in Luke Chapter 15, usually known as the *Prodigal Son*. In that lengthy parable, the elder son is full of resentment for the brother whose name he cannot even bear to utter, referring to him in conversation with his father as "your son". This same son is envious of the party thrown in honour of his brother who has already wasted his share of the inheritance. But the father points out to his elder son that he has always shared everything that he, the father, had; he had no need to be envious, because the father's generosity to the returning son did not lessen the fact that the elder son still had access to all the father possessed.

In the parable from Matthew for this Sunday, we can perhaps conclude that the vineyard owner's generosity to those who worked little does not take away from the fact that the same householder has already ensured that those who worked all day have enough to live on as well; their gift is not lessened because of the generosity bestowed on the others. **This generous God of ours cannot and will not be constrained by human notions of propriety and reasonableness.** The Gospel reveals the God of Jesus as one who chooses to give to the most unlikely and undesiring, simply because that is the nature of God.

The proclamation of the Gospel text is prepared for by a portion from the Prophet Isaiah, who was speaking to a rather despairing people, in exile in Babylon, who at this point seemed to doubt whether God would or could help them. [The Old Testament reading at Sunday Mass is always carefully chosen by the Church to shed light on, or to prepare us for the proclamation of the Gospel, which is the highpoint of the Liturgy of the Word.] The Prophet this Sunday urges repentance, and a change of heart, returning in faith to Yahweh, no longer being slow to accept his plan, believing that Yahweh could and would create something new out of the crisis of exile. Our response to the hearing of Isaiah is to break out in song in praise of a God who does not fall into categories of human success and failure. God is free and God is compassionate, the Psalmist says, slow to anger; the compassion referred to is that of a mother who does not count the cost of generous love. The unconditional love of God the Father, echoed - for most of us - in parental love, goes far beyond any list of obligations to be met. Our God is supremely free, and yet in Christ, he who is rich becomes poor for our sake. From his poverty we become rich; reaping the rewards of his self giving. We rejoice in all this during Mass this Sunday and then we take the richness of his compassion into the world with us, as we face a new week.



*I look forward very much to celebrating the Mass to mark the 60th anniversary of the opening the "new" Church of St Fergus in Forfar, and being with Father Dijo and the parishioners this Sunday afternoon at 2pm. Their Church was opened and the altar consecrated by Bishop Hart on 19 September 1963, the parish priest being the renowned Canon Patrick O'Donohoe, who later went on to be the parish priest of St Patrick's Church here in Dundee. St Fergus is a lovely church, well worth a visit, with a striking altar of jet-black marble.*