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25th Sunday in Ordinary Time (A) 2020

A sparrow complained to Mother Nature, “You gave beautiful colors to the peacock and a lovely song to the nightingale, but I am plain and unnoticed. Why was I made to suffer?” Mother nature said, “You were not made to suffer, you suffer because you make the same foolish mistake as human beings. You compare yourself with others. Be yourself, for in that there is no comparison and no pain.” That’s easy to say, isn’t it, but hard to implement. Comedian Dennis Miller puts it this way: “Remember how good you felt when your neighbor’s house got struck by lightning because he got the new satellite dish?” There is something satisfying about that, isn’t there? But listen to what the Lord said to the prophet Isaiah as we heard in the first reading, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord.” This is what makes the Gospel so striking. That landowner is relentless in generosity in his willingness to hire the ones who are still standing there and his desire to pay them a full day’s wage. The point of the parable is not to be a strict lesson in labor relations, but rather to help us understand that His grace is a pure gift. Whoever is called to follow Christ as a youth does not enjoy precedence over someone called during maturity or in life’s final moments. People who are near death should not think it’s too late to follow Our Lord. The day’s wages for every person is God’s grace. That gift will always

be infinitely greater than whatever anyone has done in life. Jesus is trying to show us that the Kingdom of Heaven is like this landowner. God takes the initiative in seeking us out. He chooses us despite our utter unworthiness. And He is lavish in His self-gift to us. To love the Kingdom of Heaven is to love this landowner and the way he acts. The temptation is for us to measure our life by what we imagine we deserve, but in truth, God is always giving us far more than we deserve, even in calling us to labor in His Kingdom! We just can't understand why God doesn't see things our way. Why doesn't He just give us the job we want or the healing we are asking for or the reconciliation we long for? It would make so much sense if He would just do what I ask. Why would He pay the same wage to the laborer who arrived early and the one who arrived an hour before quitting time? The point is, only God can be so generous as to want to care equally for all those who come to Him whether they arrive early or come much later. That's why we can be thankful that God's ways are so far above our own. Look at how the Lord cared for His chosen people over the centuries. Even though there were many occasions when He could have abandoned them, He never did! No matter how far they strayed, they only had to seek Him to find His mercy. In real life, who were the early workers and who were the latecomers? The latecomers were the sinners in Jesus' time who listened to His preaching and repented. The early workers were Pharisees who were angry that the sinners repented, entered God's Kingdom late,

and were getting the same reward as they got. If the early workers had not learned what the employer paid the latecomers, they would have been joyful and thankful for the usual day's wage. As it was, they went home angry and jealous. So, why were they jealous and resentful? Or, more specifically for us, why do so many people become happy or sad depending on whether they think they are better off or worse off than their neighbor? That's why Jesus says in the parable, "Did I cheat you? Or are you jealous because I am generous?" Like the sparrow who was jealous of the peacock and the nightingale, we often become jealous and resent the good fortune of others. Some of the reasons we become jealous is because we think that they are better off than we are. We think they have more money than we have. We think they are better looking than we are. We think they are more talented than we are. We think they are more intelligent than we are and the list goes on. Unfortunately, when we do this, we make the big mistake of judging them by the world's standards, not by God's. If we judged them by God's standards we might discover that we are just as well off as they are. You see, this Gospel challenges us to stop comparing ourselves to other people. It invites us to accept ourselves as we are. Ultimately, the important thing in this life is not what other people think of us or how hard we work in God's vineyard. The important thing is what God thinks of us, and the love that motivates our work. Remember, this is a parable about the Kingdom. God's Kingdom, Heaven, is perfect

happiness, and it is forever. In other words, if you have Heaven, you have everything and nothing more can be added to it to make it any greater or fuller. So, what seems unfair is really the super generosity and mercy of God reaching out to all people regardless of when they come to the Kingdom. So, instead of comparing ourselves to others and getting caught up in any jealousies, let's spend our efforts by being grateful for what we have been given and give back to God all that we can as often as we can. Like Winston Churchill once said, "We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give."