

The story in the Gospel today is not about the efficiency of a winery but rather a parable about the generosity of God's love and mercy for each of us, particularly for the least among us. The listener hears that each of the laborers in the vineyard receive the same "wage" at the end of the day, even though some endure the hottest part of the day, while others labor for only one hour. The listener instinctively responds, "Not fair!" Not to mention, when the owner of the vineyard goes into town at five o'clock and asks, "Are you going to stand around all day?" Someone has the nerve to say, "No one has hired us!", even though the landowner has been in town four times prior asking for laborers! Even so, the loafers go out into the vineyard. Jesus ends the parable with, "Thus, the last will be first and the first will be last." The first laborers who enter the vineyard, grumble because they receive no more than the last who enter - only receive what is fair - a full day's wage. It's as if Jesus is saying, "Yes, you did well and you are doing well; you will receive a full day's wage of My Grace." For the last to enter, the misfits, Jesus is saying, 'You will also receive a full day's wage of My Grace, because you responded to My call' to enter the vineyard. God is generous to a// who respond to the call, particularly to the "least" among us. He meets us where we're at. Responding to the call is opening the door of our heart to Jesus. Responding is the key to the kingdom of heaven because God is always willing to give as a fresh start.

As part of my deacon formation, last summer I was asked by the review board to choose a charity ministry to work with. I chose to work with the Beloit children's residential care facility. The children are there because they have experienced trauma or neglect in their life and as a result are behaviorally challenged. During my time there a once a week, we would sit around a campfire, I would make s'mores and share a story with them, and talk to them about God's love for them. I won't divulge the mushy stuff but this was one of the most amazing experiences of my life! These kids hunger for God. That summer I received a full measure of God's grace and I have reason to believe that they did too. Seeing how God worked through them to change me was amazing.

Would you agree that society is looking more and more at the human person through the lens of efficiency? Common questions lurking in the shadows are, "What can this one

produce? "What has this one done?" and, "Of what value is this one who is such an inconvenience." Questions like these can really devalue what it means to be human. As in the parable, God looks and sees the value of each person differently; He sees each person as His priceless, beloved sons and daughters and meets us where we're at, gives us a fresh start, and then works mysteriously.

Being Christian, "little Christ's", we must see the value of the human person the same way that God does. The Church too has always taught that a person has dignity not because of what they can produce or what they have done but because of who they are—a child of God, created in His image and likeness. As the Psalmist writes, "You formed my inmost being; you knit me in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am wonderfully made; wonderful are your works!" Simply because we were created by God, we have enormous value. In God's eyes all are seen the same. Imagine what St. Therese of Lisieux wrote, "The splendor of the rose and the whiteness of the lily do not rob the little violet of its scent, or the daisy of its simple charm. If every tiny flower wanted to be a rose, spring would lose its loveliness."

Jesus teaches us that eternal life cannot be earned like interest on a savings account. No, grace and salvation are pure gift to each person. Yes, it is clear that we have to respond to the gift. What we do with the gift is very important, yes, but ultimately God wants us to see that the grace of redemption is purely a gift, a gift that we cannot earn and do not deserve. The gift of our salvation is a gift won at the price of Jesus' blood -- His crucifixion and death.

Our mission is to share the good news of Jesus Christ with the whole world. It is to respond to the call to labor in the vineyard of God's divine mercy, sharing the Good News of salvation to all so that all might believe and respond to the call. For in the end we hope to hear Jesus say, "Well done good and faithful servant."

God bless you! *Dcn. Charles Bernhard*