

Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost — Proper 20
September 20, 2026
Matthew 20:1–16

By Fr. Carlos

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Brothers and sisters, There is one sentence in today's Gospel that has stayed in my heart. The landowner finds people standing in the marketplace late in the afternoon and asks: "Why are you standing here idle all day?" And they answer: "Because no one has hired us." They do not say, "Because we are lazy." They say: "Because no one has hired us." Nobody chose us. Nobody wanted us.

And rejection can be extraordinarily painful. When I was perhaps ten or eleven years old, I remember an uncle was going on a trip. I wanted to go with him, but he did not want to take me. It may seem small, but for that little boy it became a wound of rejection: *Why doesn't he want me? Am I not worthy?*

It is amazing how the human heart can carry a word, a gesture, or a moment of rejection for years. And I thank God that through prayer and inner healing, the Lord has helped me recognize and heal some of those wounds. Because Jesus does not only forgive our sins. Jesus also enters the wounded places of our hearts.

Perhaps those workers knew something about rejection.

Nine o'clock came, and nobody hired them. Noon came. Three o'clock came. But at five o'clock the landowner says: "You also go into the vineyard." There is a place for you.

Then comes the difficult part. At the end of the day, the landowner gives them the same wage as those who worked all day. And those who came first become angry. The landowner asks: "Are you envious because I am generous?".

We find the same problem in Jonah. God has mercy on Nineveh, and Jonah becomes angry, even though he knows that God is "a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love." Jonah is angry because God is merciful. And sometimes we can do the same. We are grateful for God's mercy

when we need it, but uncomfortable when God gives that same mercy to someone whom we have decided is not worthy.

This Gospel challenges me too. This week, by the grace of God, I celebrated three years as a priest. I am still a young priest. Throughout my vocation I have sometimes heard: *You are too young.*

And perhaps someone can look at me and think: *He is Latino. His English has an accent. His English is not perfect.*

But this is not only about me. We all can look at another person and decide: *He is not worthy. She does not belong.* But brothers and sisters, the vineyard does not belong to us. It belongs to God.

And God continues looking for those whom others have passed by, saying: "You also go into the vineyard."

Jesus ends: "So the last will be first, and the first will be last." And in a few minutes, we will see this at the altar. Some of you have walked with Christ for fifty years. Others for five. Some have belonged to Redeemer for decades. Others arrived recently. But when we come to this altar, the person who has followed Jesus for fifty years does not receive more Jesus than the person who has just returned home.

Christ gives himself completely. The Body of Christ, the Bread of Heaven. The same Christ. The same grace. The same mercy. So today, if there is a wounded place inside you saying, *Nobody chose me. Nobody wants me. I am not worthy,* hear Jesus saying: "You also go into the vineyard." There is a place for you.

And if there is someone whom you have decided is not worthy, hear Jesus asking:

"Are you envious because I am generous?" Thank God that his mercy is greater than our judgments. Thank God that the rejected are still invited. Because we are not here because we proved ourselves worthy.

We are here because God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.

Amen.