

*But God who is so **rich in grace**, Surpassing ev'ry measure,
The last before the first does place To teach us His good pleasure:
That none of us by works can earn The place in Heav'n for which we yearn
By grace we have this Treasure.*

Possible Prayer of Church ✧ Septuagesima Sunday [~70] February 1st 2026

Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs.

Gracious Master, You have gathered Your servants out of every nation and in all hours of life to labor in the vineyard of Your Church. Give us thankful hearts and make us glad for those who enter at Your invitation, that with them we may praise Your holy generosity. *LORD in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.***

Father of all, You have built Your one, holy Church upon the rock of Christ and ordered her according to Your gracious will. Instill in her pastors a godly wisdom to know Your Word thoroughly, and in her people a patient spirit that waits on Your heavenly provision. *LORD in Your mercy, **hear our...***

Heavenly Father, give to all Christian homes the endurance that comes from Your Holy Spirit, that husbands and wives, parents and children may be disciplined and self-controlled in their duties, run their course in this life, and continue to the end in the holy Christian faith, ready to receive the imperishable wreath of eternal life. *LORD in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.***

Almighty God, shed Your grace on the nations of the world. Suppress evil and injustice in every place and establish Your peace, that the poor would be comforted and suffer no lack. *LORD in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.***

Great Physician, be near to the sick and suffering [*especially for **Faith & Our Savior Prayers***] ... *and all those we each keep in our hearts in personal prayer [possible brief silence].* Bring them healing, hope and peace at the last. *LORD in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.***

Master of the vineyard, we are entitled to nothing and deserve only wrath, but we are bold to ask for everything by grace in Christ. Grant us repentant hearts, trusting faith in Your promises and unity of confession, that all who receive Your body and blood in Holy Communion this day may be strengthened through the forgiveness of sins for a life that abandons sin and idleness and lives in joyful service to our neighbors. *LORD in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.***

Heavenly Master, in times past You brought many into the early labor of Your vineyard, the Church. Instruct us by the example of these saints, that we, who have come to faith in the later hours of this world, may follow them in faith, hope and love, and at last receive Your generous wage. *LORD in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.***

Lord God, heavenly Father, into Your hands we commend all for whom we pray. Grant that we would look to You for every blessing and to Your Son for our salvation. Deliver us from all adversity, and preserve us in faith until the last. To You alone be all glory, honor and worship, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

PRE-LENT.1 / **SEPTUAGESIMA Matthew 20:1-16 LABORERS 2.1.26 F.OS.L**
WHAT'S THE DIFF.?

When it comes right down to it, what is the **real difference between the first and the last laborers in the vineyard?** Some might think it's simply a matter of greed and jealousy, that the first workers didn't get what they thought they deserved in comparison to the others. And we can sort of understand their point. We wouldn't like it if somebody got paid the same as we did for doing only a fraction of the work. Nothing seems to arouse our passions more than if there's even a hint that we are being treated unfairly in money matters. We love to grouse about how overpaid athletes are and how obscene corporate profits are. Of course, if we're honest about it, there's a bit of jealousy there on our part, and a sense that we deserve it as much or even more than they do because of our hard work. But that's **not** the real difference between the first and the last laborers in the vineyard. It **goes deeper than just what's considered fair.**

[DO U]HAVE A CONTRACT? The **first laborers had an agreement, a contract** with the Landowner to work for a denarius a day. That was a reasonable, decent wage for a good day's labor. The **other** [latecomer] **laborers, however, had NO such agreement or contract.** They didn't insist upon definite terms. Rather, the landowner simply said, "*Go into the vineyard, and **whatever is right**, I will give you.*"

WOULD YOU DO IT? Now **if that were you, would you have gone to work** for this Landowner? Would you labor for him not knowing what your wages were going to be, if all you had to go on was His promise to do what was right? It all depends, doesn't it? It depends on what kind of person you think Him to be - is He miserly or generous, is He a man of good character or bad? It depends on whether or not you trust Him - do you know Him, do you have a good relationship with Him? If you don't trust the Landowner you probably won't go into his vineyard. If you do, you will.

CONTRACT vs GRACE **That ultimately is the real difference between the first and the last in this Parable.** The first were dealing with the Landowner on the basis of a **contract**; the last were dealing with him on the basis of **trust in his goodness**. The first dealt with Him on what **they deemed** to be fair. The last dealt with Him on the basis of what **He deemed** to be good and right. **Do you see the difference?**

PARABLE EXPLAINED The Owner of the vineyard in this Parable **is God the Father**. By His Word and Spirit He sends out the call of the Gospel to come into His Vineyard, which is the Church, and for His people to be about the things pertaining to the holy Vine. Some come into the church from the first moments of their life, baptized as infants, remaining faithful their entire lives. Others are converted as adults. But, **some aren't brought to faith in Christ the Savior until their lives are almost over.** Some are full of good works. Others are full of **weakness and failure** and yet cling to Christ. But God **gives all the same thing at the end of the day:** full **Forgiveness of sins**, deliverance from **death** and the

devil, everlasting **Life** with Him in Heaven. He does this **NOT because He is unfair**, but rather, because He's **generous** and **loving** and **merciful**. He pours out His gifts on His people abundantly and lavishly. The reward at the end of the day is given not based on our work but on the **work of His Son**, Who lived and died and was raised again for us.

1. [2 PROB's] PROBLEM #1 The **problem arises** when some in the "Vineyard of the Church" begin to think that their length of time and their service **deserves some special reward**, who want God to work on the merit system. This is a problem for **two reasons**. **First** of all, it destroys the relationship of love that God wishes to have with His people. Love has nothing to do with what is owed or deserved. Real love is a freely given gift with no strings attached. As soon as we start wanting to deal with God on the basis of what He owes us, it is no longer a relationship of love, but in the end a business relationship - you do for me, I'll do for you. To treat God like that is not to love Him but to **use Him**.

2. PROBLEM #2 Furthermore, if we want God to deal with us on the basis of what's fair, what we deserve, we're **putting ourselves in grave danger**. Those who want the merit system with God are spiritually ignorant. If you want fair **wages**, then here's what the Scriptures say, "*The wages of sin is death.*" Those who go to hell are really only **getting what they asked for**, namely, the just payment for their faithless works. In their unbelief the damned will bitterly disagree with God's judgment and spend all of eternity suffering the anguish of growing infinitely more angry with the God they thought was unfair.

...WHAT ABOUT **YOU?!** Do you find yourself considering God to be unfair because of your situation in life or something that's happened to you? Are you one whose **religion is like a contract with God**, a system of rewards for your good behavior? Do you negotiate with God in your prayers "*I'll do this for You IF You do this for me*"? If so, then you are behaving like the first laborers in this parable, and **you must REPENT. Turn away** from ranking yourself above others, **turn away** from your own works, and **turn to the work of Christ**. Believe that it is only and entirely through Him that you receive any blessing from the Father. Trust in Christ alone to save you from death and hell.

THE REAL DIFFERENCE **That is the real difference between the first and the last**; it is the difference between **unbelief** and **faith**. Unbelievers seek a God who is fair, and when they find Him, they **don't like Him. Believers seek a God who is merciful and gracious**, and when **He finds them**, they love Him. Believers know that it is **only by grace that they are even in the vineyard**, no matter how long they've been there. They consider it a privilege and an honor to be able to contribute to the health and the growth of the vineyard. They are not jealous of the newcomer or of the one converted in his dying days, but they **rejoice that the same mercy that saved themselves** has also saved another. Even a faithful lifelong Christian recognizes that of himself he deserves nothing and that it is only because of Jesus that he has forgiveness and life. As it is

written, "...*The [free] gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.*" [**Romans 6:23**] And again, "*By grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.*" [**Ephesians 2:8-9**].

WHATEVER IS "RIGHT"... Remember, the Landowner said, "*Go into the vineyard, and whatever is right I will give you.*" The word for "right" can also be translated "**righteous**." "*Whatever is righteous I will give you.*" God is **not** simply saying, "I will give you what is fair," but, "*I will give you what My righteous Son Jesus WON for you.*" Or most simply, "*I will give you My righteousness.*" It is written in **Romans 3**, "*You are declared righteous freely by God's grace through the Redemption in Christ Jesus.*"

TRUST HIM **Do you trust** the Owner of the Vineyard to give you what is right in Christ? Do you believe that He will be good to you at the end of the day? Faith says, "*I trust You, LORD, to give whatever is right. I know You to be One Who is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love.*"

AS LUTHER SAID... **Martin Luther had this to say on today's Gospel**, "*When God declares that 'the first will be last,' He takes away all your presumptions and forbids you to exalt yourself, even above the worst, even if you were Abraham, David, Peter, or Paul. But when He says, 'the last will be first,' He bids you cast off despair and not to regard yourself unfavorably even in comparison with the saints, even though you were Pilate, Herod, Sodom and Gomorrah. ... We are all the same in our sin and death, and so we all receive the same grace. Always the Kingdom comes by grace to whomever God desires to give it.*"

1ST=LAST; LAST=1ST "*The last will be first, and the first last.*" That is the way of Christ. He who is the first and the greatest humbled Himself **to be the last of all** on the holy Cross. **He** was treated **unfairly** so that **you** would be treated **graciously**. He Himself was the One Who did the work in the Vineyard that brings you the generous reward at the end of the day. Christ was handed over to Pontius Pilate **at dawn**. He was crucified at **the third hour** of the day. Darkness covered the land at **the sixth hour, noon**. Our LORD died at the ninth hour as the perfect and complete sacrifice for your sin. He was buried at the eleventh hour of the day just before sundown.

JESUS DID/DOES TH'WORK So then, **Jesus Christ is the True Laborer in the Vineyard**. See how the work was all done before you were even brought to the faith. You need to add nothing! Jesus said, "*IT IS FINISHED.*" Only receive and cling to His mercy and grace. **Lay hold of the denarius Christ earned FOR you**, the forgiveness and life and salvation which He now gives to you in His **Words** and His **Supper**. Come in penitent faith to His Table to receive the rich blessing He gives with His Body and Blood - **NOT** because it's **fair**, not because it's **owed**; but simply because it is His good pleasure to be generous and loving toward you. **Come, and take your reward. IJ'N, Amen. SDG**