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“Do not delay, because the Lord is generous”

In his 4 June general audience, Pope Leo XIV continued the catechetical cycle on Jesus Christ, our hope, speaking about the parable of the labourers in the vineyard.

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Dear brothers and sisters,

I would like to look at one of Jesus' parables again. Also in this case, it is a story that fosters our hope. Indeed,

at times we have the impression that we cannot find meaning for our lives: we feel useless, inadequate, just like the labourers who wait in the marketplace, waiting for someone to hire them to work. But sometimes time passes, life goes by, and we do not feel acknowledged or appreciated. Perhaps we did not arrive in time, others appeared before us, or problems held us up elsewhere.

The metaphor of the marketplace is very appropriate for our times too, because the market is the place of business, where unfortunately even affection and dignity are bought and sold, in the attempt to earn something. And when we do not feel appreciated, acknowledged, we risk selling ourselves to the first bidder. Instead, the Lord reminds us that our life is worthy, and his wish is to help us discover this.

Also in the parable we are commenting on today, there are labourers awaiting someone who will hire them for the day. We are at chapter 20 of the Gospel of Matthew, and here too we find a character whose behaviour is unusual, who surprises and challenges us. He is the owner of a vineyard, who comes out in person in search of his labourers. Evidently, he wants to establish a personal relationship with them.

As I was saying, it is a parable that gives hope, because it tells us that this landowner goes out several times to go and look for those who are waiting to give meaning to their lives. The landowner goes out immediately at dawn and then, every three hours, he returns in search of workers to send to his vineyard. Following this schedule, after going out at three o'clock in the afternoon, there would be no reason to go out

again, because the working day ended at six.

This tireless master, who wants at all costs to give value to the life of every one of us, instead goes out at five. The labourers who had remained in the marketplace had probably given up all hope. That day had come to nothing. Nevertheless, someone still believed in them. What point is there to take on labourers only for the last hour of the working day? And yet, even when it seems we are able to do little in life, it is always worthwhile. There is always the possibility to find meaning, because God loves our life.

And the originality of this landowner is also seen at the end of the day, at pay time. The master had agreed to pay the first workers, who go into the vineyard at dawn, one denarius, which was a typical day's wage. He tells the others he will give them what is fair. And it is right here that

the parable provokes us: what is fair? For the owner of the vineyard, that is, for God, it is just that each person has what he needs to live. He called the labourers personally, he knows their dignity, and on the basis of this, he wants to pay them, and he gives all of them one denarius.

The story says that the labourers from the first hour are disappointed: they cannot see the beauty of the gesture of the landowner, who was not unjust, but simply generous; who looked not only at merit, but also at need. God wants to give his Kingdom, that is, full, eternal and happy life, to everyone. And this is what Jesus does with us: he does not establish rankings, he gives all of himself to those who open their hearts to him.

In the light of this parable, today's Christian might be tempted to think, "Why start work immediately? If the pay is the same, why work more?"

Saint Augustine responds to these doubts, saying: “Why dost thou put off him that calleth thee, certain as thou art of the reward, but uncertain of the day? Take heed then lest peradventure what he is to give thee by promise, thou take from thyself by delay” (*Sermon 87*, 6, 8).

I would like to say, especially to the young, do not wait, but respond enthusiastically to the Lord who calls us to work in his vineyard. Do not delay, roll up your sleeves, because the Lord is generous and you will not be disappointed! Working in his vineyard, you will find an answer to that profound question you carry within you: what is the meaning of my life?

Dear brothers and sisters, let us not be discouraged! Even in the dark moments of life, when time passes without giving us the answers we seek, let us ask the Lord who will

come out again and find us where we are waiting for him. He is generous, and he will come soon!

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