

**Christ the King—St. Stephen
Scripture Reflection
25th Sunday of Ordinary Time
2026—A Cycle**



What do I see?

Study the above image of workers laboring in a hot sun.

If I have spent or still spend days/nights of my life in any kind of hard, physical labor what images come to mind about that time? Were they happy days or sheer drudgery—or something in between? What life-lesson(s) did I learn from that labor?

Image source: [New Life Narrabri](#)

Opening Prayer

Laborers in God's Vineyard

Lord Jesus,
you came into this world...
to seek and save the lost.
Show me how to share...
your loving invitation with them.
Teach me, Good Lord, to serve you...
as you deserve:
to give and not to count the cost...
to fight and not to heed the wounds...
to toil and not to seek rest...
to labor without asking for reward...
other than knowing I do your will.
Amen

Source: [Daily Prayers](#)

Scripture Readings

Isaiah 55: 6-9 “Seek God while he’s here to be found; pray to him while he’s close at hand.”

Psalms 145: 2-3, 8-9, 17-18 “God is good to one and all; everything he does is soaked through with grace.”

Philippians 1: 20-24, 27 “Alive, I’m Christ’s messenger; dead, I’m his prize. Life versus even more life! I can’t lose.”

Matthew 20: 1-16 “God’s kingdom is like an estate manager who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. They agreed on a wage of a dollar a day and went to work.”

Introduction to the 25th Sunday of Ordinary Time

Both Paul and Matthew present us with dilemmas. Paul in prison writes to his converts in Philippi, “This jail only serves to make Christ more accurately known, regardless of whether I live or die.” Matthew shares Jesus’ parable about a landowner who rightfully does whatever he wants when it comes to paying his workers. The point of the parable? God’s generosity is God’s own business, not anyone else’s.

Scholars make the point that Paul personally wrote the letter to the Philippians during one of his multiple imprisonments. He addressed it to the community at Philippi, a city located in the region of Macedonia in northeastern Greece. That community had always shown genuine concern for Paul’s well-being. More than once he had counted on their material assistance. The writing is deeply personal and filled with tenderness. By insisting on earning his own living as a tentmaker, he avoided any suspicion of personal interest when asking for donations.

Matthew 20: 1-16, Jesus spoke these words at the end of one of his “workers in the vineyard” parables, “The last will be first, the first will be last.” In offering this story, he shattered any mistaken notion we may cling to that we have piled up more “merit points” than others. So, shouldn’t God favor us more than others who do less? Pay close attention to the story as Jesus compares several different groups of laborers. Matthew seems to compare “veteran” post-Resurrection converts, who received the word of God in the early days of his and other apostles’ and teachers’ ministries to those more recently baptized into Christ. In the parable, *all* workers are paid equally, as they themselves had *agreed upon*. Matthew reminds us that faithful Christians—and *all people on earth*—are equally loved in the sight of our Savior.

First row seats... or standing room only, let’s just be glad we’ve caught the right bus!

Reading from the Book of Isaiah (55: 6-9)

“Seek God while he’s here to be found, pray to him while he’s close at hand. Let the wicked abandon their way of life and the evil their way of thinking. Let them come back to God, who is merciful, come back to our God, who is lavish with forgiveness. I don’t think the way you think. The way you work isn’t the way I work.

“God’s Decree. As the sky soars high above earth, so the way I work surpasses the way you work, and the way I think is beyond the way you think.”

Personal Reflection

Yahweh says through the prophet, “I don’t think the way you think. The way you work isn’t the way I work.” How we wish that *our thoughts* would match Yahweh’s thoughts. In this one sentence, the prophet tells us everything we need to know: “Seek God while he’s here to be found; pray to him while he’s close at hand.” It’s a good thing our God is generous and forgiving. It’s not so easy for us to accept and live by God’s invitation, especially after someone has hurt us deeply.

Everyone experiences times when God seems really close to us. We enjoy those sacred moments. It’s too bad we can’t permanently lock ourselves into that mindset.

“Seek God while he’s here to be found.”

— *How do I personally relate to the nearness/distance of God? Do I recall a specific time period during which I felt really close to God and God to me? What was going on in my life at that time? [Do this in writing if you can.]*

Psalm 145 (2-3, 8-9, 17-18)

In praise of God’s grandeur

The Lord is near to all who call upon him.

I’ll bless you every day,
and keep it up from now to eternity.
God is magnificent and can never be praised enough.
There are no boundaries to God’s greatness.
The Lord is near to all who call upon him.

God is all mercy and grace—
not quick to anger but rich in love.
God is good to one and all;
everything he does is soaked through with grace.
The Lord is near to all who call upon him.

Everything God does is right—
the trademark on all his works is love.
God’s there, listening for all who pray,

for all who pray and mean it.
The Lord is near to all who call upon him.

Personal Reflection

What an intimate, personal psalm! “God’s there, listening for all who pray.” The post-Babylonian exile author (not David) must have composed this psalm in a time of special closeness to Yahweh. The central place of the ‘reign of God’ unites this psalm with Jesus’ core preaching about the Kingdom of God, which must continue to grow in our fragile, inconsistent society.

“The Lord is near to all who call upon him.”

— *What about those who do not believe in God, let alone “call upon him”? Is God near... or far from them? Where do I place myself on that “nearness/distance” scale? What am I doing each day to assure that I am not ignoring God? When I catch myself failing in this regard, what steps do I take to restore that nearness?*

From St. Paul’s Letter to the Philippians (1: 20-24, 27)

“I’ve decided that I really don’t care about their motives, whether mixed, bad, or indifferent. Every time one of them opens his mouth, Christ is proclaimed, so I just cheer them on!

“And I’m going to keep that celebration going because I know how it’s going to turn out. Through your faithful prayers and the generous response of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, everything he wants to do in and through me will be done. I can hardly wait to continue on my course. I don’t expect to be embarrassed in the least. On the contrary, everything happening to me in this jail only serves to make Christ more accurately known, regardless of whether I live or die. They didn’t shut me up; they gave me a platform!... “Alive, I’m Christ’s messenger; dead, I’m his prize. Life versus even more life! I can’t lose.”

Personal Reflection

Paul wrote his letter to the Philippians during his imprisonment in Rome, around 60–62 AD/CE (cf. [Philippians 1: 13](#)). We may wonder who Paul refers to in verse 20 [*“their motives”*]. We sense his frustration at being locked up and unable to deal with community issues in the various churches in person. In this case, there’s a problem that needs solving and he can’t be there. Leaders in the community see things somewhat differently from each other. We sense Paul’s frustration that he couldn’t freely travel and help them work out their differences.

— *When in my life did I feel a similar kind of dilemma? What was going on?*

The Gospel According to Matthew (20: 1-16)

“God’s kingdom is like an estate manager who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. They agreed on a wage of a dollar a day and went to work.

“Later, about nine o’clock, the manager saw some other men hanging around the town square unemployed. He told them to go to work in his vineyard and he would pay them a fair wage. They went.

“He did the same thing at noon, and again at three o’clock. At five o’clock he went back and found still others standing around. He said, ‘Why are you standing around all day doing nothing?’

“They said, ‘Because no one hired us.’

“He told them to go to work in his vineyard.

“When the day’s work was over, the owner of the vineyard instructed his foreman, ‘Call the workers in and pay them their wages. Start with the last hired and go on to the first.’

“Those hired at five o’clock came up and were each given a dollar. When those who were hired first saw that, they assumed they would get far more. But they got the same, each of them one dollar. Taking the dollar, they groused angrily to the manager, ‘These last workers put in only one easy hour, and you just made them equal to us, who slaved all day under a scorching sun.’

“He replied to the one speaking for the rest, ‘Friend, I haven’t been unfair. We agreed on the wage of a dollar, didn’t we? So, take it and go. I decided to give to the one who came last the same as you. Can’t I do what I want with my own money? Are you going to get stingy because I am generous?’

“Here it is again, the Great Reversal: many of the first ending up last, and the last first.”

Personal Reflection

You might like to begin this reflection by skipping ahead to the video recommended later in this commentary under “Watch”: [“The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard”](#) (4 min.), produced by the Church of Latter Day Saints (Mormon).

— *How would I have felt if I had been one of the all-day workers in Jesus’ parable?*

For Inspirational Listening, Watching, and Reading

Listen

[Psalm 145](#) composed by [Jesse Manibusan](#) and sung by [Sarah Hart](#)

And just because... [Hymn to Christ the King](#), sung by [Sarah Hart](#)

Watch

[“The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard”](#) (4 min.), produced by the Church of Latter Day Saints (Mormon).

Read

Yes and... by Fr. [Richard Rohr](#), OFM (Franciscan).

Short but heartfelt reflections offering deep insight into the meaning of spirituality.

Preview of Next Weekend's Scriptures

Readings for the 26th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Ezekiel 18: 25-28 "Do I hear you saying, 'That's not fair?' God's not fair!? Listen, Israel. I'm not fair? You're the ones who aren't fair!"

Psalm 25: 4-9 "Show me how you work, God. School me in your ways."

Letter of St. Paul to the Philippians 2: 1-11 "God lifted [Jesus] high and honored him far beyond anyone or anything, ever."

Matthew 21: 28-32 "Jesus said, 'Yes, and I tell you that crooks and whores are going to precede you into God's kingdom.'"

Closing Prayer

(edited, abridged, and adapted for use here)

A Prayer for Humility

(If you wish, you can click on the above link to pray along with the composer as he sings this prayer.)

Mighty God and gentle Lamb...
Lord of all creation...
how I long to know you...
how I strive to serve you.
Help me now to love you even more.
Give me a humble heart to praise you...
and listening ears to hear your voice...
willing hands to serve you...
thankful spirits to rejoice.
Lord of all, I adore you.
I bring this prayer before you.
Create in me a humble heart.
When my thoughts turn proud...
remind me of the grace you freely give.
When I lose my way, find me.
And draw me close to you again.
Give me a humble heart to praise you...
listening ears to hear your voice...
willing hands to serve you...
a thankful spirit to rejoice.
Lord of all, I adore you...
and I bring this prayer before you.
Create in me a humble heart. Amen

Source: Prayed/Sung by [Mark Fortino](#)

Unless otherwise indicated, the Sunday readings are from *The Message* Bible translated by Rev. Dr. Eugene H. Peterson (Catholic Edition)

Peterson's translation of the Bible is a highly interpretive paraphrase, celebrated for its readability.

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