

**Reflection on the Gospel-25<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time Year A  
(Matthew 20:1-16a)**

-Veronica Lawson RSM

From 1973 to 1975, East Jerusalem was my home. Early each morning, I crossed the road from the Chaldean Patriarchate to the Ecole Biblique Archéologique Française. I would greet the Palestinian day labourers lined up beside their vehicles, waiting for employment in the vacant lot that divided Israeli from occupied Palestinian territory. In the wake of the Yom Kippur War, these workers were living through hard times. In the morning, they were chatty and cheerful. Those who found work no doubt remained cheerful: they had the means to support their families and could find some meaning in their lives. Those still waiting for work at midday or later were dejected and shamed, not least by the prospect of returning home without their daily bread. Those who were hired found honour in the society and the means to sustain themselves and their families. Those who missed out on work suffered hunger, indignity and a sense of powerlessness. Confronted by this spectacle day after day, I began to understand the parable of the labourers in the vineyard.

In Matthew's parable, those who have worked all day grumble because the underemployed are made "equal" to them. Jesus makes it clear that people's worth is not to be measured in terms of their capacity for economic production. They are all equal as persons. Pope Leo XIII, writing back in 1891 about the condition of the working class, echoes this aspect of the parable. Those who cannot find work and those who cannot work on account of pandemic or disability or visa restrictions know something of the experience of the Palestinian workers. Their needs are no less urgent than the needs of those who have productive and well paid employment. Minimal social security benefits might address their basic material needs but are less than effective in addressing the underlying issues of human dignity.

Parables yield meaning differently in different contexts. We may want to consider the corrosive effects of "envy". Faced with the growing disparity between rich and poor in our world, we may wish to raise questions about the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of the landowner. Those who are conscious of the plight of asylum seekers and refugees, as well as those ineligible for Job Seeker or Job Keeper or any other benefit, may come with questions about "generosity" offered from a base of power over against equal access to the world's resources. In the face of pandemic and of climate crisis, many of those who used to be safe in economic terms now find themselves with huge debts and diminishing security. Many in our world are every bit as desperate as the Palestinian day labourers, waiting in line as never before. As we celebrate this third Sunday of the Season of Creation, we might accept the invitation of today's gospel story to live in ways that promote quality of life for every one of Earth's inhabitants.