

we do, we will always get the kingdom of heaven wrong! For the kingdom of heaven is its opposite! In the kingdom of this world, he who finishes the race first gets the Gold Medal. But alas, the Kingdom of heaven is a kingdom of grace. God gives His grace according to His grace. Those who finish last by faith receive the honor and reward of He who finishes first. By God's grace, we Christians are "paid" the wages of eternal life for the work we didn't do, but rather the work that Christ did! The parable is most comforting.

The 11th hour workers are blessed because they go to work in the vineyard for no other reason than the master called them to go. They trusted that the master would provide what is just. Their cup overflows (Ps 23:5) with an overabundance of what could be expected. What a blessing to serve such a master!

An error could be made concerning our works then. We could think, "Heck, I'll just wait til I see my life drawing to a close, then start doing the works God has given me to do. This is wrong on two accounts. One, God calls us through the Gospel. We cannot by our own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ or come to Him. The Lord calls when He calls. We don't get to choose! We can only reject the Call when it comes! Attempting to put the "call" off until the 11th hour is rejecting the gift!

Two, even if we could put off our Christian responsibility until life's end, that wouldn't be a remotely Christian to do, which is why the Epistle today is an excellent illustrative exhortation to faithfulness from the moment the Holy Spirit converted us to faith until life's end.

Paul writes, "Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it." In relation to the parable, the point is that we all have been given work to do. No, the work doesn't merit us the wage. No, it doesn't mean we compete against each other as if we could receive a bigger or grander prize for working harder, as if whoever does the most works wins. But what the Epistle does teach us is a proper Christian works ethic, and how our works *relate* to grace and faith. God called you. His Call is just. Trust Him like the 11th hour workers. By grace through faith, you will receive eternal life. Now that you have that assurance of eternal life, work hard. Do what God has given you to do in your vocations. Be the best Christian you can be in service to your neighbor. "Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, we an imperishable" (1 Cor 9:25) as Paul writes. He says, "So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air" (v. 26). Paul didn't labor in vain; he didn't go through the motions as if his vocation did not matter. Your labor is not in vain either.

Until Christ calls us home, there is work to do. Temptation for the young is that they can put it off til they are older, thinking, "Let the retired people do it who have more time." The temptation for the retired people is to think, "Let the younger folks do it who have the energy. I've already put in my time." When such temptation comes upon you, remember Paul's exhortation: "Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that *you* may obtain it!" Do the work God has given you to do so that you may seize your wage – the gift of eternal life that Christ Jesus earned for you through His suffering, crucifixion, and death on the cross!

Is there anyone here who is not tired and weary of this past year? Just the word "pandemic" is nauseating! Who wants to keep working for the Lord when they're tired and exhausted? The Christian life is a marathon. It can feel like our work is in vain; it can certainly feel like we are boxing as one beating the air!

When you're tired, exhausted, or just feel like you're "over this or that", remember Jesus' words: "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Mt 11:28). How do we come to Jesus? You're doing it now; and you have the opportunity to do it more intimately in a few minutes in the Sacrament of the Altar. We come to Jesus by trusting that in fact He comes to us. We receive rest by trusting that Christ coming to us gives us rest. This is what "by faith" means. Certainly you can come to Church and receive the Sacrament of the Altar and not *feel* a lick of a difference from when you walked in here this morning. And human reason and experience actually might say you could even *feel* worse. But we don't put our faith in our feelings. We don't trust what our heart feels or our thoughts think. We trust Jesus' words. "By faith" is more encompassing than trusting in Jesus for forgiveness. It's trusting all the promises He makes!

Christ teaches that He is present in the Word and Sacraments. When Jesus says, "Come to me", faith trusts, "I come to Jesus by going where He promises to be!" And when Jesus says that our coming to Him will give us rest, regardless of how we might feel or think, we must learn to trust that in Christ *we have rest*. Human reason and experience says, "I'm just eating a little piece of bread and drinking a little sip of wine. I can't get any

rest from that.” But Jesus promises, “Under this bread and wine, I give you my body and blood. Find respite here.” Faith must trust Jesus.

Yes, we might all be tired. Yes, we might all be weary. But none of us have been stuck in the hands and feet with nails and hoisted up on a cross, bearing the sins of the entire world. None of us have been forsaken by the Father. That was Jesus.

Here He gives you the respite you need, which strengthens you in both body and soul to keep battling; keep working in the vineyard until life everlasting.

“The last will be first, and the first last.” That makes no sense according to human reason. But we trust it’s true because Jesus said it! How much more so when He promises and gives us the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation! Trust that you have received your rest and received your Christ. By faith, you have obtained the prize already now. Live like it! Carry on courageously, brothers and sisters! In Jesus’ name, Amen.