Spirituality
Scripture for Life



Men listen during a training session on worksite safety at Catholic Charities Bronx Day Laborer Center in the Bronx borough of New York City Feb. 16, 2023. (OSV News/Reuters/Shannon Stapleton)



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The BBC drama series "The Hardacres" portrays the division between wealthy and poor and their different ways of thinking about the world. In the course of saving someone's life, Sam Hardacre, the father, loses the use of his hand. In a world without justice, the family is plunged into destitution until Mary, the wife, stops working as a fish gutter and opens a fried herring stall. The business flourishes to the degree that they are able to buy the fishery from its unjust and cruel owner.

Sam's goal, for which he is labeled a "radical," is to create a business that will be both profitable and just. In the process, his former companions are suspicious that he is no longer one of them, and the wealthy reject a family like this with no pedigree and a distinctly different way of thinking.

Sam's story reflects the message of today's Liturgy of the Word.

Twenty-Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

September 20, 2026

Isaiah 55:6-9
Psalm 145
Philippians 1:20c-24, 27a
Matthew 20:1-16a

Isaiah sets us off into a mind and soul-expanding journey with God's pronouncement, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways." This statement, applicable to every era, interprets the first commandment: "I am the Lord, your God, you shall not have false gods before me."

Most of us probably don't worry much about that commandment. We certainly don't worship idols!

Isaiah would tell us that's our way of thinking. He would explain that injustice, prejudice, unwavering opinions, and prioritizing money and success are all forms of idolatry. They're ways of abandoning the demands of the God of the Judeo-Christian tradition who calls for love to be the guiding principle of economic, political and

cultural life. (See Pope Leo XIV's *Magnifica Humanitas*, 186.) That's what builds the kingdom of Heaven.

To describe the kingdom of Heaven, Jesus told a controversial parable. He described a wealthy man seeking day workers — a group whose plight has remained much the same throughout history. Today in the USA, 86% of day laborers have experienced some form of exploitation; 66% report wage theft, according to the Bureau of Business Research. Even U.S. citizens have little recourse when threatened with job loss: Partial pay is better than none. Many are part of the 14% of the U.S. population experiencing food insecurity, the Department of Agriculture says.

These statistics offer a contemporary perspective on Jesus' story.

The star of Jesus' parable is the landowner whose estate represents the kingdom of Heaven. Reading between the lines, we realize that this fellow is not looking so much for laborers as for people who need work. So, he keeps going back to the marketplace even in the late afternoon. The ones he encounters explain that they had no intention of spending the day idle, but nobody hired them.

Unlike many estate owners, this fellow really saw the job seekers and their plight. Without steady work, their chances of providing food for their families were perpetually precarious. How frustrated must they have felt as they stood around desperately hoping to be picked for a job? What were they thinking about their hungry children? What would they tell their wives?

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The landowner saw them as they were: worried, willing, unchosen. Hiring them on the spot, he gave them hope for at least a little to bring home.

What did they think when he gave a full day's wage to them and to the ones who had labored all day? It was a shocking deviation from the way things were supposed to be. This crazy businessman cared more about workers than grapes! Dignity over profit!

He operated from a different mindset. Today, he might be called a socialist whose practices would lead to ruin. How dangerously far might things like this go?

Jesus designed this parable to shake everybody up — especially the most privileged. He wanted not just to provoke them, but to elicit some recognition of others, especially the poor. He hoped to jolt them into new ways of thinking, to free them from unnecessary self-interest so they might appreciate God's perspective on the world.

Magnifica Humanitas (14) reflects this parable. Our outrageous landowner had a perspective and set of values contrary to normal ways of thinking. Scandalously (to some), he prioritized people. He sought the common good, honoring the dignity of every person, he practiced an option for the poor and promoted peace and justice.

We've allowed our world to become structured by inequality, rivalry and contention. We've accepted and even idolized systems that cause poverty and environmental destruction. Too many accept the lies that underpin division. As far as Earth is from heaven, so far are these from God's ways.

According to *Magnifica Humanitas*, our task today is to design systems and a culture centered on human beings rather than on the accumulation of wealth or power. The kingdom of heaven is like this. This new way of living can go as far as we allow it.