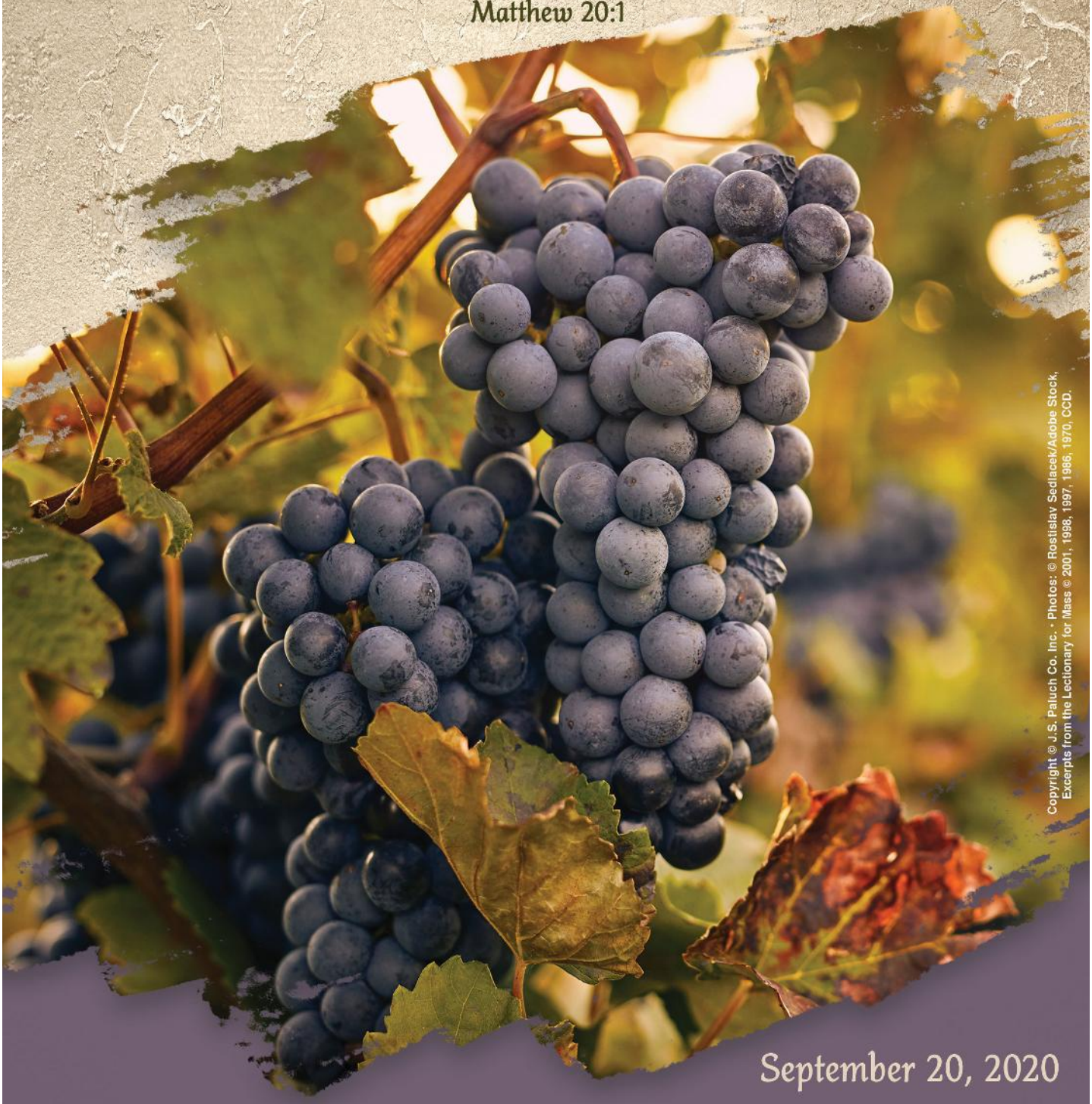
The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner
who went out at dawn
to hire laborers for his vineyard.

Matthew 20:1



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September 20, 2020

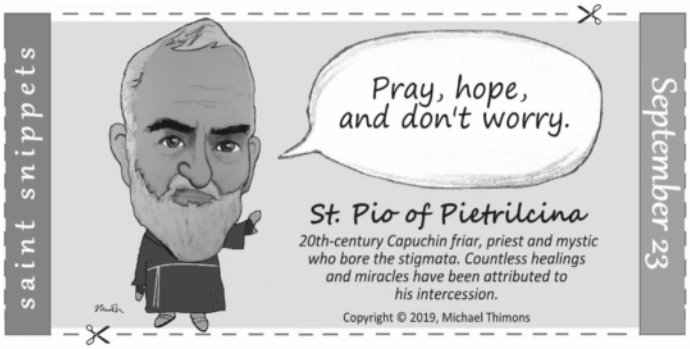
Twenty-Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Saint Pius of Pietrelcina (1887-1968)

September 23

Did the World War II American flyer really see Padre Pio in midair, preventing the bombing of his village below? Did Pio actually "bilocate" in Italy, the Holy Land, even America, as countless witnesses testified? Or "read hearts" before penitents spoke? What of the stigmata, Christ's wounds imprinted on Padre Pio's hands, feet, and side? John Paul II, who as a young man visited Pio, never mentioned these extraordinary elements at the canonization. Instead, the pope spoke of "trials accepted with love," referring perhaps to sanctions restricting Pio's faculties for hearing confessions and celebrating public Mass, imposed because of criticism, later discredited, sent to the Vatican; of Pio's offering his sufferings in union with Jesus' passion for a suffering world; of his continual availability to sinners seeking direction and absolution; of Padre Pio's prayer that blossomed in charity, especially through his House for the Relief of Suffering, a healthcare facility that anticipated by decades today's holistic partnering of medical science and spirituality. Finally, how comforting for us ordinary Christians, this extraordinary saint's most frequent advice: "Pray, hope, and don't worry!"

—Peter Scagnelli, Copyright © J. S. Paluch Co.



Direction

Isaiah tells us something that we already know, and yet seem to forget every now and then. He tells us, essentially, that God is God and we are not. When we're confused and troubled and can't figure everything out, it might be wise to recall Isaiah speaking on the Lord's behalf and explaining that God—who is on a much more, well, Godly wavelength than we are—moves in ways we can't even imagine.

Saint Paul, by comparison, has everything figured out. Kind of. At least he understands his calling in life—to magnify Christ in everything he does. That should give all of us the direction we need. Jesus gives us direction, too, explaining to us once again in the parable of the workers in the vineyard that the last will be first, and the first, last.

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Readings for the Week

Monday:	Eph 4:1-7, 11-13; Ps 19:2-5; Mt 9:9-13
Tuesday:	Prv 21:1-6, 10-13; Ps 119:1, 27, 30, 34, 35, 44; Lk 8:19-21
Wednesday:	Prv 30:5-9; Ps 119:29, 72, 89, 101, 104, 163; Lk 9:1-6
Thursday:	Eccl 1:2-11; Ps 90:3-6, 12-14, 17bc; Lk 9:7-9
Friday:	Eccl 3:1-11; Ps 144:1b, 2abc, 3-4; Lk 9:18-22
Saturday:	Eccl 11:9 — 12:8; Ps 90:3-6, 12-14, 17; Lk 9:43b-45
Sunday:	Ez 18:25-28; Ps 25:4-9; Phil 2:1-11 [1-5]; Mt 21:28-32

Saints and Special Observances

Sunday:	Twenty-fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Monday:	St. Matthew
Tuesday:	Autumn begins
Wednesday:	St. Pius of Pietrelcina (Padre Pio)
Saturday:	Ss. Cosmas and Damian; Blessed Virgin Mary

Autumn

Listen! The wind is rising,
and the air is wild with leaves,
We have had our summer evenings,
now for October eves!

—Humbert Wolfe

Humility

No human being is too big to be humble, but some human beings are too small.

—Anonymous

Today's Readings

First Reading — Turn to the LORD who is generous in forgiving (Isaiah 55:6-9).

Psalm — The Lord is near to all who call upon him (Psalm 145).

Second Reading — Live your lives in a way worthy of the gospel of Christ (Philippians 1:20c-24, 27a).

Gospel — The last will be first, and the first will be last (Matthew 20:1-16a).

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Twenty-fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time
September 20, 2020

Turn to the Lord for mercy;
to our God, who is generous in forgiving.
—Isaiah 55:7b

Treasures From Our Tradition

Over time, the severe form of one-chance penance collapsed under lack of enthusiasm for its burdens and its public nature. As ordinary Christians prayed for the great sinners, it must have occurred to them that they were sinners no less, and they required a form of penance also. The Irish came to the rescue, never having had a public form of penance, but inventing a system called "tariff penance," which was completely private, available to everyone, and wildly popular. After a detailed confession, priest and penitent would lie on the floor before the altar and recite a number of psalms. The priest then pronounced a judgment, a tariff, giving a task or a prayer to complete before reconciliation.

The surviving guidebooks for confessors make for hair-raising reading as the sins of which the Irish people were supposedly capable were catalogued and keyed to penances. Cattle or sheep rustling might require stripping down to sing psalms in an icy brook, for example, or adultery could be the occasion for rolling in a thicket of thorns. All of this might have stayed in Ireland had not the monks had a desire to travel, blazing across Europe with their theology and their rituals, and their sense that Christians needed strong medicine for sin and the assurance of God's forgiveness.

—Rev. James Field, Copyright © J. S. Paluch Co.

Children are usually still quite young the first time they have occasion to shout, "That's not fair!" At some point in our lives, we've probably all felt the bitterness of unfairness. Today's readings agree that life isn't always fair—yet, unexpectedly, invite us to rejoice! We rejoice because God's mercy is totally unfair: God lavishes us with forgiveness and love even when we deserve less. Both the reading from Isaiah and the psalm praise the great mercy of God, mercy that forgives our sins over and over. In the Gospel parable, Jesus demonstrates that God longs to give good things to all of us, even to those who seem less worthy. When Saint Paul reflects on God's goodness, embodied in Jesus Christ, he can hardly wait to enter his heavenly reward.

An Unexpected Lesson

Jesus' parable depicts workers who "punch the clock" at various times throughout the long day: dawn, nine, noon, three, and five o'clock. Regardless of when they began working in the vineyard, the laborers all receive the same reward. The reward seems lavish to the latecomers, of course, and shockingly unfair to the long-faithful workers. The landowner soothes his most dutiful laborers, however, delighting in them as friends and transforming their bitter confrontation into a reflection on generosity. The laborers who arrived at five o'clock might have been late to the job, but those who began at the crack of dawn were last to understand the extravagant bounty of the landowner. Seen in this way, the parable discusses not only God's generosity toward "unworthy" believers, but also the Lord's inexhaustible patience toward those who thought they had nothing more to learn.

Beginning Again

Today's readings provide sweet refreshment to all of us who know the bitterness of discouragement. No matter how stubbornly we determine to improve ourselves, the human condition often leaves us in puddles of failure and regret. Jesus has a new plan for us. Today's Gospel parable demonstrates the mercy of God, mercy that rejoices in fresh beginnings. We take comfort in knowing that God accompanies us in our labors—and works for us—whether we struggle with caring for our bodies, striving for patience, avoiding gossip, making time for prayer, being generous, overcoming addiction, remaining in recovery, or simply attending to our daily work. Jesus shows us that he actively engages with us each time we fall short. From dawn to dusk, the Lord seeks us out, calling us to join him in the vineyard. Now, today, right this moment, is our dawn. Or our nine o'clock. Or noon? Ignore the clock! Jesus invites us to forget past failures; divine mercy wipes them away. Today's psalm insists that the "Lord is near to all who call upon him." In hope, then, we begin again.

Today's Readings: Is 55:6–9; Ps 145:2–3, 8–9, 17–18; Phil 1:20c–24, 27a; Mt 20:1–16a

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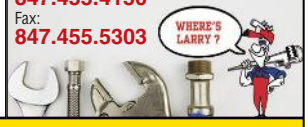

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