

This is not a popular parable. If Jesus delivered this parable today to the Chamber of Commerce, the Parent-Teacher Organization of a school, a baseball players' clubhouse, or a City Council meeting, he would be heckled out of the room. No matter how often we hear it, our reaction is always something like, "Say, what?" It sounds as though Jesus promotes an unfair system of reward. He seems to admit it's an *uneven* system, but not that it's unfair. Everyone gets at least what is fair. Some people get more than what is fair. You can be inconsistent, the parable seems to say, as long as you are fair and generous.

One poor woman reflecting on this parable put herself in the shoes of those who were standing around all day. She said they weren't exactly idle. They were making themselves available for work; they just couldn't get a job. They went through the whole day not knowing if they would ever get hired, worried about mouths to feed back at home. When they finally go to work, they rejoice. Those who worked longer only got the same wage, but they were spared the anxiety of wondering whether or not the children would be hungry at the end of the day.

The Catholic bishops in our country have supported the DREAM act as part of their justice for immigrants campaign. The letters stand for Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors, and the act hopes to help youth pursue the American dream. It proposes a path to citizenship for undocumented children brought into this country at a very young age but who now have graduated from high school and want to avoid deportation to a country they do not know, separated from their families. The act does not condone illegal immigration, but aims to help reform a real situation in a generous way.

Today's psalm proclaims, "The Lord is near to all who call upon him." It lists many attributes of the Lord: He is compassionate, just, holy and near. There is another word that is repeated again and again: "all". Psalm 145 says, "The Lord is good to all and compassionate toward all his works. The Lord is just in all his ways and holy in all his works. The Lord is near to all who call upon him, to all who call upon him in truth." By the end of the psalm today, you have a vision of a God who understands the needs of all and responds with consummate wisdom. As God spoke through the mouth of Isaiah in the first reading today, "my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord." Our reasons and plans are not always as great as we think they are. God sees a bigger picture, a picture that includes all of us.

That gospel does not say God rewards people for being lazy; he rewards those who want a better opportunity than they have received. God is generous to them. We should be too. Some people who are employed think that those who are unemployed are lazy, taking advantage of handouts from society. Not necessarily. Many of them want a job more than anything else in the world, but they haven't had the chance. Not all of us can employ someone, but we can all check our attitudes about those without work. The employed may be the ones who enable the unemployed and the undocumented to realize something it's hard at times to imagine: The Lord is near to all who call upon him. He may be as near to them as you and I are.