

In the Gospel of Matthew, the Kingdom of heaven is mentioned no less than 32 times, while Jesus himself says that “*the Kingdom of heaven is like...*” or “*may be compared with...*” no less than 12 times. It's his most preached-about topic – the discovery and embrace of God's perfect love in this life – and so it stands to reason that we should try to understand our place within the Kingdom of heaven.

In Matthew's Gospel, there are three **states of being** in relation to the Kingdom of heaven: those who are **out**, those who are **in**, and those who are **coming into** it. Our behaviour matters because what we choose and how we live can either open our hearts to God's grace or close them to it. So, to help us understand what can keep us from **living in God's Kingdom**, I'm going to name three behaviours that close our hearts to God's grace.

The first is lack of forgiveness. A person may be a faithful Mass-goer, but if refusal to forgive someone has a stronghold – or even a foothold – in their heart, then that unforgiveness can close them off from the very mercy they come to receive. Let's not forget last week's Gospel, where we were challenged to forgive, not just the perfect number of **seven** times, but 77 times! Notice what unforgiveness says: “***You hurt me. You owe me an apology.***”

The second behaviour is pride. Pride is the root of all sin because, instead of trusting in God's wisdom and commands, we put ourselves in the position of deciding what is right and wrong for ourselves. Pride says, “***I know better.***” *I know what God asks, but I think my circumstances are different. I know what the Church teaches, but I don't agree with it. I know what Scripture says, but I have my own way of*

seeing things. Pride places **my judgment above God's**. It puts me at the centre.

The third behaviour that closes our hearts to God's grace is greed.

Greed says, **"It's mine."** What I have. What I've earned. What I've accumulated. What I deserve to keep, is mine. The issue isn't simply how much we possess but whether **what we possess begins to possess us**.

Forgiveness, pride and greed may look like three different things, but underneath them all is the same attitude: **What about me?** This is tough stuff but here's the amazing thing: **"We love because He first loved us."** We can forgive because He forgives us first. We can humble ourselves because He humbled himself for us. We can give more of our time and resources because Jesus has already given his entire life for us. God is extravagantly generous to us - **are we ready and willing to become extravagant in our generosity towards God and towards each other?**

This is where today's Gospel is terrific because the Kingdom of heaven challenges our instinct to keep score. We want fairness: **"She owes me an apology before I can forgive her."** **"I've done my duty because I received Eucharist."** **"I earned what I have through hard work – it's mine."** But the vineyard turns that way of thinking upside down and so, I'm going to conclude today with three things this Gospel reveals about the Kingdom of heaven.

First: God keeps looking for people. The landowner goes out five different times during the day because God never stops inviting people into his vineyard of love. Some come into the Kingdom early in life. Some come much later. Some of us have spent years working in the

vineyard; others may only just have heard the invitation. No one is beyond God's call to life and love.

Second: The reward is relationship. The denarius represents the gift of **life in the Kingdom**. This "**life**" is experienced through a personal relationship with Jesus, who says, "**I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.**"

It's not something we can obtain through Masses, ministry or good works because it's God's pure gift.

The last thing this Gospel reveals about the Kingdom of heaven is that comparison steals the joy of grace. The first workers were paid exactly what had been promised. Nothing was taken away from them. Their problem began when they **looked sideways**. They saw someone else's blessing and suddenly their own blessing wasn't enough. They began with gratitude and ended with resentment because they compared what they had received with what someone else had received. **The Kingdom of heaven isn't about getting what we think we deserve. It's about receiving what God freely gives – and becoming people who freely give in return.**

So where is my place in the Kingdom of heaven? My place is in the vineyard of life and love – receiving the generosity of the landowner, allowing his grace to change me, and becoming generous myself. More **forgiving**, more **humble** and more **generous**. **We love because He first loved us.** That is life in the Kingdom of heaven.