

25A

The famous French dramatist Jean Anouilh in one of his plays, describes a dramatic scene outside the gates of Heaven. The faithful are all gathered with their tickets and are waiting impatiently for the pearly gates to open. On the fringe of the crowd is a small bedraggled group who have no tickets, eleventh hour people who are ever so grateful to have made it to the gates of Heaven at all. A rumour begins to circulate among the ticket holders. 'Did you hear that he is letting them in too? Well! I don't believe it - after all we did'. Incredulity gives way to resentment which in turn boils over into anger. They begin to shout in protest and blaspheme against God and at that very moment they're all damned.

Have we ever been tempted to consign forever to the sin bin all those who have fallen from grace over and over again along the road of life and never take note of their struggles and the many times they rose again after a fall and turned back to God.

How many of us would like to tell God what to do and reserve his mercy for so called 'deserving' people. We might be tempted to think that the people who find God at the eleventh hour should be at the back of the cue as far as His mercy is concerned. That doesn't at all mean that those at the front of the cue are less favoured or less loved than those who come later in the day. But it's not our job to judge who is worthy or not of God's forgiveness. The main trust of Christ's mission was to 'seek out and save those who are lost'. If there is 'joy in heaven when a sinner repents', then we on earth should be just as joyful.

Life is full of surprises and so also is the Gospel. How many so called 'undeserving' people do we find in the ministry of Jesus who were written off by the self-righteous religious elite of His day? They were envious because Jesus gave a fresh start to people who had fallen from grace and were looking for peace of

mind. Examples which immediately spring to mind are: Zachaeus, the unscrupulous tax collector who turned over a new leaf and felt humbled when Jesus opted to stay at his house, the good thief who at the 11th hour dared to ask Jesus for a place in His Kingdom, Mary Magdalene who had been plagued by demons but felt at home beneath the Cross of Jesus who had forgiven her many sins because she loved much, the woman of Samaria whose life was turned round after meeting Jesus at the well of Sychar and the Prodigal Son who left his reckless life of abandon behind and was overwhelmed by the welcome he received from his father, much to the ire of his elder brother who couldn't share his father's joy at the return of his younger sibling. Joy and jealousy don't mix.

So, we rejoice with those who have turned back to God whether it be at the sixth, ninth or eleventh hour. God is unstinting with his mercy if we give him half a chance to dispense it. Today's parable of the labourers in the vineyard assures us of that.