

## Dollar A Day

Gilberto Blanco bludgeoned New York City police officer Dawn Ortiz with a folding chair in the parking lot of the Coney Island Gospel Assembly Church. Ortiz drew her service revolver and shot him dead. Five feet, eight inches and a hundred fifty pounds of corpse lay unclaimed at the medical examiner's office for the better part of a week.

Such is the life of a day laborer in the big city.

Mr. Blanco entered the country illegally and spent two years sharing a tiny bedroom above a Chinese bakery, hustling work in front of the Starbucks at 65th Street and 18th Avenue. The two men who regularly stood with him, hoping for a job each morning, noticed his absence. But few others seemed to. No one quite knows what happened on the day he died. The shooting at the church is under investigation.

When Jesus chose day laborers for a parable about God's grace, he knew what he was doing. In his world, as in ours, the surprising thing was not that the jefe paid some workers extra, but that he paid anybody at all. Old Testament law makes special provision to counter the tendency to stiff those with no social resources for defending their rights (Dt 24.15). However, Jeremiah indicates that shafting tramp laborers posed a problem in his day (Jer 22.13) and James reveals that things hadn't gotten better by the time he and his brother Jesus swelled the ranks of the working classes (Ja 5.4).

Indeed, what struck the first set of brazeros in this story is probably the least striking thing about it. Jesus portrays a land owner who seems to care more about sending workers out than about getting the crop in, who is more eager to pay money than to make money. He sends the last gang out when there can't be much crop left to pick or much time left to pick it.

The laborers' attitudes calibrate their capacity for grace. The first shift carefully negotiates a standard contract. The second set takes the job on a handshake and a smile. The third bunch settles for the handshake. And all of them get paid.

Something tells me that this boss would have liked Gilberto Blanco, would have hired him, would have paid him, and would have noticed if he didn't show up the next morning. The same something tells me that the God whom this boss portrays did, in fact, notice Gilberto Blanco, knew his name, and even numbered the hairs on his head.

Serving that kind of Lord is its own reward. If I can remember that, I can worry less about whether I get what's coming to me, and whether somebody else gets less or more. And if I can remember that, perhaps, like my Boss, I can begin to think more about the workers than the work. Perhaps I can notice Gilberto Blanco.

Requiescat in pace,

Doug