

Twenty-Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time – October 4, 2020 – Good Shepherd Parish

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 5:1-7

Let me now sing of my friend, my friend's song concerning his vineyard. My friend had a vineyard on a fertile hillside; he spaded it, cleared it of stones, and planted the choicest vines; within it he built a watchtower, and hewed out a wine press. Then he looked for the crop of grapes, but what it yielded was wild grapes.

Now, inhabitants of Jerusalem and people of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard: What more was there to do for my vineyard that I had not done? Why, when I looked for the crop of grapes, did it bring forth wild grapes? Now, I will let you know what I mean to do with my vineyard: take away its hedge, give it to grazing, break through its wall, let it be trampled! Yes, I will make it a ruin: it shall not be pruned or hoed, but overgrown with thorns and briars; I will command the clouds not to send rain upon it. The vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the people of Judah are his cherished plant; he looked for judgment, but see, bloodshed! for justice, but hark, the outcry!

Psalm: Ps 80:9, 12, 13-14, 15-16, 19-20

R. (Isa 5:7a) The vineyard of the Lord is the house of Israel.

A vine from Egypt you transplanted;
you drove away the nations and planted it.
It put forth its foliage to the Sea,
its shoots as far as the River.

R. (Isa 5:7a) The vineyard of the Lord is the house of Israel.

Why have you broken down its walls,
so that every passer-by plucks its fruit,
The boar from the forest lays it waste,
and the beasts of the field feed upon it?

R. (Isa 5:7a) The vineyard of the Lord is the house of Israel.

Once again, O LORD of hosts,
look down from heaven, and see;
take care of this vine,
and protect what your right hand has planted
the son of man whom you yourself made strong.

R. (Isa 5:7a) The vineyard of the Lord is the house of Israel.

Then we will no more withdraw from you;
give us new life, and we will call upon your name.
O LORD, God of hosts, restore us;
if your face shine upon us, then we shall be saved.

Scripture Reading: Philippians 4:6-9

Brothers and sisters: Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God. Then the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing what you have learned and received and heard and seen in me. Then the God of peace will be with you.

Gospel: Matthew 21:33-43

Jesus said to the chief priests and the elders of the people: "Hear another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a hedge around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a tower. Then he leased it to tenants and went on a journey. When vintage time drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants to obtain his produce. But the tenants seized the servants and one they beat, another they killed, and a third they stoned. Again he sent other servants, more numerous than the first ones, but they treated them in the same way. Finally, he sent his son to them, thinking, 'They will respect my son.' But when the tenants saw the son, they said to one another, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and acquire his inheritance.' They seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. What will the owner of the vineyard do to those tenants when he comes?" They answered him, "He will put those wretched men to a wretched death and lease his vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the proper times." Jesus said to them, "Did you never read in the Scriptures: The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; by the Lord has this been done, and it is wonderful in our eyes? Therefore, I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that will produce its fruit."



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INVITATION TO PRAY

Pause for a few moments of silence and enter more deeply into the presence of God.

Proclaim the Scriptures out loud.

As you listen to the scriptures be attentive to a word, a phrase, a question, an image, or a feeling that emerges. Reflect on this quietly or share it aloud.

INVITATION TO REFLECT

There is a very powerful truth-telling device, as we saw two Sundays ago: the device called *story*. Our brains love stories because they include events with “before-and-after” built right in, along with suspense, action, relationships and intercommunication; not to mention emotion and disappointment and elation and so on. These elements are the most like daily experience of any device we have in the language. So, Sunday we will hear several tales of a vineyard. The first story tells about “a friend” who carefully built a vineyard: clearing stones, building a watchtower, planting the choicest vines (First Reading). He even “hewed out a wine press.” But the vineyard yielded bad grapes. God tells the people of Jerusalem and Judah in vivid language that they themselves are this vineyard, and that he is going to destroy it and trample it down. They would not let God's love grow up among them. In the Gospel Jesus embroiders this tale. In just one sentence he handles the part about planting a vineyard, digging out a wine press, building a tower. Then he goes further. In his version he says that the owner rents his rich vineyard to tenants, as was the custom, and he trusts them to raise choice grapes for him. In due season he sends his servants to collect the yield—which must have been great because the tenants dishonestly want to keep everything including the vineyard. But the tenants beat or stone or even kill the servants!

Next, a surprising, seemingly implausible twist to the tale. The owner decides to send his own son, thinking that the tenants will surely respect him. Would you have done the same? Wouldn't you or I have said, “I will keep my family away from these criminals?” I surely would. But not the owner. He sends his only son into the trap and the tenants kill him. The details of the two stories are different, but isn't it the same story: about God punishing those who fail to produce? Actually, the two parables are not the same. There is much, much more in the Gospel. Jesus hints at this afterwards: Did you never read in the Scriptures: “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; by the Lord has this been done, and it is wonderful in our eyes.” (Gospel) This is a new metaphor, and it is the key to the Gospel tale. It fills the story with dramatic new meaning. The son sent into the vineyard is Jesus himself! He is to be rejected and killed, just as the prophets and the owner's son were. But here is the difference: as God's son he is entirely willing to go among the sinning people. He lives by compassion, so danger takes second place. If the main character in the Gospel were called *Life*, and it had its own choices to make, it would desire to turn into another being, one called *Love*. Life always yearns to go back to its source, the everlasting union called by that simple name, love. Greed and disregard stop this progress. True Life gets buried. It rises again when we look to Jesus on Sundays. He is love. He is there for us in our vineyard. God sent his own son into the trap of human life not because life is perfect, but because love is.

INVITATION TO GROUP SHARING

1. What are some things you could do if you discovered that all the “grapes” in your spiritual garden are all turning out small or sickly?
2. How do you feel about the God of peace standing guard over your mind and heart? What does St. Paul say takes the place of anxiety and the worries? Are his words true for you?
3. Who are God's messengers right now? What changes in society do they advocate? How can you somehow be God's envoy in your community, work, church or the world? Will you move toward necessary changes in society?

INVITATION TO ACT

Determine a specific action (individual or group) that flows from your sharing. When choosing an individual action, determine what you will do and share it with the group. When choosing a group action, determine who will take responsibility for different aspects of the action. These should be your primary considerations.

CLOSING INVITATION TO PRAY

Give thanks to God (aloud or silently) for new insights, for desires awakened, for directions clarified, for the gift of one another's openness and sensitivity. Conclude with the following:

Almighty ever-living God, who in the abundance of your kindness surpass the merits and the desires of those who entreat you, pour out your mercy upon us to pardon what conscience dreads and to give what prayer does not dare to ask. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen

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Prayer to St. Michael

St. Michael the Archangel, defend us in battle. Be our defense against the wickedness and snares of the Devil. May God rebuke him, we humbly pray, and do thou, O Prince of the heavenly hosts, by the power of God, thrust into hell Satan, and all the evil spirits, who prowl about the world seeking the ruin of souls. Amen