

From the Homily Library of Fr. Callistus Iyorembor

27th Sunday in Ordinary Time - Year A – October 4, 2020

The Fruitless Vineyard

Our first reading is from the Prophet Isaiah where we have the beautiful image of the Vineyard. When in the Holy Land, I had the opportunity of visiting some of its famous vineyards; Israel. For the first time I saw what a wine press looks like! Our tour guide described to us the process of making wine. Notice that this image of the vineyard that the Prophet Isaiah is describing was somehow a familial one for ancient Israel as we can see that Jesus Himself bases His own parable in the Gospel today on a story-related vineyard.

I will take you back to the lines of our first reading: *“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.”*

What I want you to see is this friend has invested so much in this vineyard. It is constructed on a fertile land, spaded and cleared of stones. You cannot plant on stones. He plants it on choice territory and plants the best vines he can find. Even more, he builds a watch tower. What is the watch tower? If you had something precious, would you not build a watch tower to keep an eye on your precious property to keep invaders and trespassers out? Private property! Keep off! Do not trespass! Finally, he built a wall around it. Again, to further protect it from invaders and trespassers.

The point is the builder (the friend) has gone out. He does everything he can to cultivate his vineyard. He gives it great consideration. And finally, he expects great things from it.

God of Israel

The builder is symbolic of the God of Israel and the various ways He cultivated the people of Israel.

God gave them the laws through Moses on Mount Sinai, the scripture, (Torah), the patriarchs - Abraham, Isaac Jacob, the prophets to warn them, the Temple. He gave them everything including the covenant: *"I will be your God and you shall be my people."* These are all the ways God shared His life with Israel - the great art of liberation by which He brought the Israelites out of slavery into freedom He provided manna and water from the rock the parting of the Red Sea.

Isaiah's image takes a rather dark turn.

"Then he looked for the crop of grapes but what it yielded was wild grapes." Despite all the efforts this builder made, when he comes to the vineyard he is frustrated. He finds only wild grapes; grapes not suitable for the production of wine. But rather bad grapes - in the Hebrew - *stinking grapes*.

This is symbolic of how God gave His whole heart to His people and they have not responded. They have not cooperated with grace. They went after idols, committed abominable acts. One time they were craving for the flesh pot in Egypt. They grumbled and complained about God.

Do not think for a second that this story is not about us it or that it is just about ancient Israel with whom God interacted centuries ago. ***This is our story.*** We are meant to see ourselves.

New Israel

Paul refers to all of the baptized as the *New Israel*.

All kinds of prophetic voices have been raised in this same way. Sacraments, the Mass, the Eucharist, the example of the Saints, the teaching office of the Bishops are symbolic of the various ways God continues to cultivate His vineyard. These are all the ways God has lavished His grace upon us.

When He comes at the end of our lives what will He find? Will He find wild grapes or stinking grapes? Or will He find grapes suitable for the production of wine? It is a question of cooperating with God's grace.

Cooperate with Grace

When we cooperate with grace, we flourish.

- receiving communion in a state of grace
- praying daily
- upholding the virtues of peace and justice
- forgiving those who have offended us bear fruit of Justice peace
- loving not just who will love us back
- striving for holiness

When we do these things, we are cooperating with grace. When we do these things, we flourish. As we go about this week, think about the various ways God is inviting you cooperate with His grace.