

J.M.J.

Advent Day of Reflection Touchstone Contemplation

Old Testament Reading:

Isaiah 5:1-7

In the Book of the Prophet Isaiah we read...

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 the 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 saw bloodshed!

For justice, but hark, the outcry!

Just before His crucifixion, Jesus uses this passage as the basis for a parable that He gives to the chief priests and elders of Jerusalem who have decided to kill Him.

Gospel Reading:

The Gospel of 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 the 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?”

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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 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 fruits."

Reflection:

In this time of pandemic and so much political and societal unrest, it seems very much like the wheels are falling off the wagon. Where is our peace in such times?

When we hear these two readings together, together, we see that in both Isaiah's time and in Jesus' time that not much is different for them either. Where is their peace of mind?

The readings that we have shared with you are from the 27th Sunday of Ordinary Time from our year A readings.

In our first reading from Isaiah, the vineyard owner has done everything possible to have his vineyard produce the choicest grapes, but he only gets wild grapes.

In our Gospel reading, we see that the landowner doesn't receive the produce from his vineyard that he expects, rather not because the vineyard produces only wild grapes, but because it is filled with murderous tenants.

Sandwiched between these two readings for the 27th Sunday of Ordinary Time was a reading from the Apostle Paul's letter to the 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."

In these times of pandemic, calls for racial justice, and social and political upheaval and contestation, it can feel very much like we are surrounded by wild grapes and murderous tenants. How is it that we can remain firmly rooted in the peace that St. Paul talks about? How is it that we can find the peace that surpasses all understanding?

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Jesus speaks many times in the Gospels about how He is in the Father and the Father is in Him. In the Gospel of John in Chapter 14 in verses 18-21 Jesus notes the following in speaking of his return to His Father in Heaven:

“I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.

In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me, because I live and you will live.

On that day you will realize that I am in my Father and you are in me and I am in you.

Whoever has my commandments and observes them is the one who loves me.

And whoever loves me will be loved by my Father, and we will come to them and make our homes with them.”

The significance of what Jesus is telling the disciples of his time is also true for us as His disciples in this time of pandemic and social unrest....

If we have within us Jesus’ commandments and we observe them, we have firmly placed the eyes of our heart on Jesus. Having that kind of graced focus to how we are living our lives means that we live in a way that is focused on love of neighbor and through that love of God. This is why Jesus says, “Whoever has my commandments and observes them is the one who loves me.” Seeing that love, elicits from God the Father an even greater love for those who love His Son, and as Jesus says, that sort of love will mean that God the Father and God the Son will come to the disciple who loves them and make their home with him or her.

If God comes and makes his home with you, then you will have within you the peace that surpasses all understanding that St. Paul talks about.

