

Fr Dispin John – Homily 27th Sunday Ordinary Time 04/10/2020 St John's Mitcham

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People these days asked me what I do. I sometimes, you know, go for a walk every day, practically, but during the day, apart from doing other things and attending calls and making contact with beautiful parishioners I spend in the past two months in particular, a fair bit of time in the backyard, preparing the ground for a possible planting. The frustrating thing is that I can't get the plants, so the nurseries are not open. And I've tried to do some, you know, click and collect or drive and collect stuff. And the tomato plants are not available in many of the shops around. So an open message. If you have a tomato plant, please contact me. (laughing)

But the joy of planting, the joy of seeing something grow its first to shoot in the flower and then the fruit that is an immense joy. God takes joy in making us who we are. Do you remember in Genesis, we read, after God created everything, he looked at it and then God saw that everything was good. So taking pride in his work, this is how we lead in the scriptures that God takes pride in having created you and me. The gospel tells us today of the wicked tenants. But prior to that, in the first reading that Don read for us, we have the prophet Isaiah talking to us of God's planting the vineyard and expecting some good fruit, but instead of good fruit, it produces sour grapes. Then God gets angry.

And then we come to the gospel where the tenants are expected to give the produce to the landowner. What do we see in these two? The common thing that I see is the expectation of God as the creator, as the landowner, as the master. If we believe that God has created us, there is an expectation of us. If we believe that God has given us what we have, our talents, our gifts, our health, our riches, it is the gift of God. And therefore, there is an expectation from God. In the parable, the landlord plants a vineyard, leases it to tenants and goes abroad. Now, absentee landlords were a common thing in the time of Jesus. Landlords would leave, you know, after leasing their land to tenants, they would leave and maybe they would go somewhere else. And then there is an expectation that their land gives the produce or the tenants return the produce to the landowner.

What we also see in this story is an amazing play of God's patience, particularly in the gospel. God says, well, yeah, they thrashed a few people, but I'll send a few more this time, a few more. But while God was being patient, the tenants were getting more and more wicked. In the end God says, well, I have only one option now. I'll send my son. And when the son comes, they became even more wicked. They killed the son. God's patience is met with wickedness. I wonder sometimes if that is how we deal with God's patience. In the course of our history, especially Christian history, we know that we have failed both in the leadership and as a people of God, we have failed many, many times. You know, they talk about the popes in the Renaissance. Popes in the 15th and 16th century and how corrupt were and how they failed to see the criticisms and the call and the cry for change. And therefore the 16th century Protestant reformation took place because the Popes of the time failed to listen.

And we repeated again and again. Both in last Sunday's gospel, and in this Sunday's gospel, we see that God is calling us to repentance. You know, that first son who said I will not do and walked away, but later thought of it and went back and did the father's will. Now in this Sunday's gospel, God is being patient and expecting us to repent and change so that we will produce fruit. Because the very fact, the very purpose of our being created is to produce, to bear fruit for the vineyard, which is God's place. At vintage time, all of us must bear fruit. And if for some reason, or with some excuse we say, I cannot produce now. Well, again and again, the scriptures tell us that God expects, God expects. God is always waiting there to say, I expect you to produce.

God may seem absent at times. That does not mean God is not looking, I can live whatever I want to live like. Again, that seemingly absence of God is not real. God is always present. And therefore, there is a constant call, there must be a constant call within us, deep within us, to say, am I producing good fruit? Am I producing fruits at all? Are they sour? Are they good? Do I treat the life that God has given me, do I treat that as a gift and a responsibility to bear fruit. So, lethargy or laziness or any excuses not to produce fruit will be met with severity, even punishment. And that's how God deals with us because God has given us something, there is an expectation and that expectation must be fulfilled. How do we live that? Well, just in the two weeks that we have listened to the word of God, your words must match with your actions. Your actions must reflect your words. Or, in a more philosophical way, as St Paul invites us in the second reading, fill your minds with everything that is true, everything that is noble. So, fill your minds with good things, not rubbish, everything that is good and pure, everything that we love and honour and everything that can be thought virtuous or worthy of praise. That is what God wants us to do. And Jesus invites us today to live a life worthy of God and to bear fruit with a change of heart.