

27th Sunday A

Isaiah 5:1-7; Philippians 4:6-9; Matthew 21:33-43

“One of the best ways to capture people's attention,” someone has said, “is to engage them in the fine art of storytelling.” Perhaps, that is the reason why in past weeks Jesus used parables.

Two Sundays ago, the Lord told us a story of a land owner who went out and hired laborers for his vineyard, and at the end of the day, the owner paid latecomers, the ones who worked only one hour, full day's wages, the same amount as he paid those who worked long hours, and “bore the day's burden and the heat.”

Last Sunday, He told us the story about another land owner who had two sons. He came to his sons and told them to go work in the vineyard. One immediately said “YES” to his father but then never got with it. The other son said a definite “NO” but then changed his mind and did as his father had asked.

In our gospel reading for this Sunday Jesus tells us another parable about “a landowner who planted a vineyard ... leased it to tenants and went on a journey.” When harvesttime came, the owner sent his servants to obtain his share of the crop. but the tenants refused to pay. Instead, they abused the servants and kept all of the harvest to themselves.

Then he sent his son, thinking 'They will respect my son.' But no matter. They plotted to kill the son, hoping to acquire the inheritance and keep it to themselves. Finally, the owner had no choice but to take back his vineyard, and lease it to other tenants.

What is Jesus telling us in this parable?

The Lord is reminding us of the privilege given to us, that we are the tenants working in His vineyard. We are only tenants. We do not own anything in this world. Everything we own is from God, including the very air we breathe, the pew we sit on, the bread and wine we receive in Holy Communion, all are from God. And ultimately, everything in this world belongs to God.

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Believing all this, something still happens, however. We want everything to be ours, don't we? We want to be in our control of everything. And therein lies the dilemma.

The more we treat this world as if we own it -- the more we distance God from our lives and the emptier our lives be without God. In other words, the more we grasp for things of this world, the more fruitless our lives become. Jesus warns us about this fruitlessness today:

**“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.”**

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ:

Good fruit only comes about when we move beyond ourselves and return to others what God has already given us. This is what is ultimately pleasing to God. This is what truly builds up his kingdom on this earth. It's simply not enough for us to feel that if we come to this holy place week after week, and put a few dollars in the basket or say a few prayers, then we have done our job.

As Catholics we are tenants living in God's vineyard with service to render to him, and because we have been given such a great and beautiful garden, we must see it all as belonging to God and our and sharing it with others, especially the less fortunate, the poor, the hungry, the outcast, the lonely.

That's how we produce good fruit -- by using every good thing provided by God for the good of others. If only we could stop saying "mine", and start saying "It's all yours, God."

Might not the relationships in our lives become more caring, more giving, more lasting?

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Might not the hungry get fed, the naked get clothed, and the lonely find comfort?

Might not every person live without fear of disease or harm?

Simply put, might not the kingdom become more and more of a visible reality?

Dear friends, the work God has offered to us, the privilege God has given is not for God's gain or benefit but for our own good. You see, God knows that the only way to be His tenants is through the pouring out of ourselves for the good of others. The Cross reveals that truth to us in a profound way.

And the only way we will be able to give in the way that God asks us to, is, if we truly believe in the depths of our hearts that what we are asked to give is all from God and His generosity to us in the first place. But in his wisdom and kindness God has provided these good things and entrusted all to our care.

So, in order to live life in accordance purposefully and beautifully, we are to cling to "**whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious . . .**" that St. Paul tells us today's Second Reading. We are to live as God calls us to live - with greater love and kindness, with greater generosity and mercy, with greater compassion and understanding.

We at Sts. Peter and Paul are more like that, particularly in these days of high risk of infection and economic hardship.

I see many parishioners and volunteers strive to give more of themselves to other people and serve Christ more wholeheartedly in this place. I see many take more responsibilities to do God's work in his vineyard in this community than surround ourselves with privileges and demands.

That's how we cultivate God's vineyard and produce good fruit – not only the finest and truest of fruit but also fruit into the everlasting life. Amen.