

***ctkAlive!* Scripture Study**

27th Sunday in Ordinary Time 2020—A Cycle Readings



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Note: For your convenience and to broaden your benefit from this and all sessions in this series, you will find links to books, authors, and other references mentioned in the text.

Caution: Links to the internet are like rabbits dashing across a hunter's path. Instinct says, "Leave the reflection and chase after that link!" Instead, we suggest waiting until you have followed the entire reflection. Then take all the time you wish to follow these interesting and educational links. Exception: In the course of these reflections, you may have an opportunity to watch or listen to a relevant song or video.

Opening Prayer

(edited and abridged for use here)

A Prayer to Ease Anxiety

O God, my loving Father, I thank you for this day. You know how worried and anxious I am about _____.

Help me to be sensible and see that worrying about things does not make them better. Help me to be calm and serene in such situations of life. Help me to cast my worries and anxieties upon you; I know you care for me.

Strengthen my conviction that nothing can happen to me that you cannot guide me through safely. And nothing can ever separate me from your love.

I believe and trust that your arms are beneath me and above me to give me peace that the world cannot give and can never take away.

Jesus, my Risen Lord, you said to your disciples on Easter night, "Take courage. . . . It is I. . . . Do not be afraid." Amen

Source: [St. Michael Parish, Livermore, CA](#)

Introduction to the 26th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Three of this weekend's Scriptures center around vineyard images. This has been a consistent pattern over the past three weekends. One can wonder if the liturgists who designed the Sunday Lectionary (scripture readings) had in mind that September is harvest time in northern hemisphere vineyards? Let's follow this vineyard thread.

Isaiah 5: 1-7 "Let me sing of my friend, my friend's song concerning his vineyard."

The Book of Isaiah stands out as the most important prophetic book. Jesus often quoted Isaiah, as did later New Testament writers. The Israelites cherished their favorable status and mission in the world. As long as they remained faithful to Yahweh, good fortune smiled upon them. When Israel ceased to maintain its privileged status, the whole population surrendered their sense of divine blessing as Yahweh's beloved. Worse, the Chosen People adapted the beliefs and morals of their pagan neighbors.

Isaiah charted Israel's fall from grace, as he graphically describes in this passage. He points to the royal family, who failed to shoulder their responsibilities, thereby dragging the people down with them.

Recall: Chapters 1-39 contains the words of Isaiah himself. Unnamed later prophets added the remainder of the book.

Psalms 80: 9, 12-16, 19-20 "O Lord of hosts, look down from heaven and see, take care of this vine."

This psalm dates 300-400 years after King David. His youngest son, Solomon, carried on his father's work of making Israel a nation that others looked up to as a model. The psalmist laments Israel's downward fall since those glory days. In the following centuries, everything David and Solomon had built collapsed in ruins. The Babylonian Exile in the 500s BC/BCE resulted directly from the infidelity resulting from the people's silencing of all prophetic voices.

Philippians 4: 6-9 "Keep on doing what you have learned and received, heard and seen from me. Then, the God of peace will be with you."

That's the Christian challenge, isn't it? "Keepin' on keepin' on" in good times and not so good.

Matthew 21: 33-43 "There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a hedge around it, dug a wine press, and built a tower."

This passage picks up from where last weekend's left off. We've spent the last few liturgical weeks with Jesus telling one vineyard story after another. Living in the vicinity of Northern California's wine-growing areas, we have a clear image of vineyards and the men and women who own and work in them. Let's use those images and experience to probe Jesus' lessons.

A Reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah (5: 1-7)

“Let me sing for my beloved my love-song about his vineyard. My beloved had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. He dug it up, cleared the stones, and planted the choicest vines. He built there a watchtower and hewed out a wine press as well. Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only wild grapes.

“(Yahweh speaking through Isaiah says,) ‘now, inhabitants of Jerusalem and people of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard (*Israel*). What more was there to do that I have not done for my vineyard? I expected a yield of good grapes. Why did it yield only sour grapes? Now I will let you know what I am going to do with my vineyard: I will remove its hedge and it will be burned; I will break down its wall, and it will be trampled on. I will make it a wasteland, I will neither prune nor hoe it; briars and thorns will grow there. I command the clouds, as well, not to send rain on it.’

“The vineyard of Yahweh Sabaoth is the people of Israel; and the people of Judah are his pleasant vine. He looked for justice but found bloodshed; he looked for righteousness but heard cries of distress.”

Personal Reflection

Through the prophet Isaiah, Yahweh vocalizes a love song expressing the tender story of Yahweh’s creative love for the people of Israel. At one time or another, perhaps often, we all experience a song that spontaneously comes alive within our consciousness—often at the moment of awakening from sleep.

— *What song do I hear in my heart today about the people I love? _____
Is it one of deep affection or disappointment/dissatisfaction with the way my life is going?*

— *When did I experience an unrequited love—a love I bestowed only to be rebuffed—on the part of a spouse, friend, child, relative, others? What did it feel like? How have I dealt with this wound? Who or what helped me regain my balance?*

— *Let me list the people I consider the prophets among us today?
_____ Are they honored? Or do most people treat them like Israel’s post-Solomonic prophets?*

Antiphon: Psalm 80 (9, 12-16, 19-20)

A plea for the return of God’s favor

The vineyard of the Lord is the house of Israel.

You had a vine you brought from Egypt.
You drove nations out, to plant it in their land.

The vineyard of the Lord is the house of Israel.

On the ground that you cleared,
it took root and filled the land.
Its shade covered the mountains,
its shoots went through the mighty cedars,
its branches reached out to the sea
and its shoots to the River.

The vineyard of the Lord is the house of Israel.

Why, then, have you broken down its walls,
so that all who pass by pluck its fruits?
The beasts of the forest ravage it,
and all creatures of the field feed on it.
Turn again, O Yahweh of hosts,
look down from heaven and see;
care for this vine and protect the stock your hand has planted.

The vineyard of the Lord is the house of Israel.

Then, we will never turn away from you;
give us life, and we will call on your name.
Restore us, O Yahweh, God of hosts;
make your face shine on us, that we may be saved.

The vineyard of the Lord is the house of Israel

Personal Reflection

“Turn again, O Yahweh of hosts, look down from heaven and see;
care for this vine and protect the stock your hand has planted.”

Another vineyard parable describing the abundance of grapes gone sour and destroyed by misuse. The psalmist sings/prays that Yahweh will forgive the nation and save the Chosen People—*again*.

— *If I were to rewrite this psalm using examples—perhaps other than vineyards—to describe the state of the world and/or the USA, what example(s)/imager(ies) would I use?*

[Give it a try, focusing on the destruction of something beautiful and your plea for restoration of that beauty.]

— *Where do I find inspiration to do the hard work of (re)building my life, my family, my state, and nation?*

[Let composers [Jill Jackson-Miller](#) and [Sy Miller](#) inspire you with their song/prayer, “[Let There be Peace on Earth](#),” featuring Vince Gill, Amy Grant, Chet Atkins, and Michael McDonald.]

From St. Paul's Letter to the Philippians (4: 6-9)

“Do not be anxious about anything. In everything, resort to prayer and supplication, together, with thanksgiving, and bring your requests before God. Then, the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers and sisters, fill your minds with whatever is truthful, holy, just, pure, lovely, and noble. Be mindful of whatever deserves praise and admiration. Put into practice what you have learned from me, what I passed on to you, what you heard from me or saw me doing, and the God of peace will be with you.”

Personal Reflection

“Do not be anxious about anything.” Recall the opening prayer for this reflection, a Prayer to Ease Anxiety.

— *What source of anxiety troubles my life today? How can I relate my source(s) of anxiety to Paul's words today? What “takeaway” do I find in the Apostle's words? How helpful is his advice in light of my personal anxiety?*

From this passage, it *might* seem that Paul advises his converts to pray and keep themselves aloof from the fray of the world and society around them?

— *Considering the prevailing values of the Roman Empire, what overarching message do hear in this passage? Passivity? A new and different call to action? [Reflect on this, allowing time to weigh both sides.]*

Proclamation from the Gospel according to Matthew (21: 33-43)

“Jesus said to chief priests and the elders of the people: ‘Listen to another example: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a fence around it, dug a hole for the wine press, built a watchtower, leased the vineyard to tenants, and then, went to a distant country.

“When harvest time came, the landowner sent his servants to the tenants to collect his share of the harvest. But the tenants seized his servants, beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. Again, the owner sent more servants; but they were treated in the same way. Finally, he sent his son, thinking, ‘They will respect my son.’

“‘But when the tenants saw the son, they decided, ‘This is the one who is to inherit the vineyard. Let us kill him and his inheritance will be ours.’ So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

“Now, what will the owner of the vineyard do with the tenants when he comes?

“They said to him, ‘He will bring those evil men to an evil end, and lease the vineyard to others, who will pay him in due time.’

“And Jesus replied, ‘Have you never read what the Scriptures say? The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This was the Lord's doing, and we marvel at it.’

“Therefore, I say to you, ‘The kingdom of heaven will be taken from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit.’”

Personal Reflection

After sharing the parable of the wicked tenants, Jesus asks his listeners, “What will the owner of the vineyard do with those tenants when he comes?” The listeners, seeming not to have gotten that *they themselves* were the “tenants” he referred to. They answer (*in blind self-condemnation*), “. . . bring them to an evil end!”

— *If I can recall a point in my life when I was unable to recognize and face my own sins, what was going on inside me at that time? When did I finally accept the need for my own conversion (even if I am a lifelong Christian)? What did my realization lead me to?*

— *How often do I examine my inner life with honesty to explore where I stand with Christ? When I find fault with myself, what do I do about it? How hard is it for me to say, “I’m sorry” to another person? To God?*

Shelter-in-Place

Jesus is not political and does not associate his name with any political party or movement. His concerns are justice and the common good of *all* peoples. It’s a given that no party, no candidate is perfect. My votes for all national and local offices, even for state propositions and local measures, call for thoughtful discernment.

This is a major decision point, *especially for Catholics*. To vote sensibly, I need to weigh both the good and not so good in each candidate and issue in coming to a final decision. (*A greater fault might be my decision not to vote at all!*)

— *How convinced am I that casting my vote for one candidate in favor of another is a moral decision? How willing am I to vote for a candidate I might consider as the “lesser of two evils”?*

Our late pastor, Fr. Brian Joyce, put forth this challenge: “What would Jesus want *me* to do?”

— *How can I be sure my voting decisions represent what Jesus would want me to do?*

Write about your feelings and your lived experience of these issues during your journaling time (below).

Journaling Prompts

What insights have I gained from reflecting on the readings for the 26th Sunday of Ordinary Time in light of my current social demands and restrictions. Suggested prompt:

— *After reflecting on the four scriptures, what made the deepest impression on me?*

We mustn’t simply be grateful “recipients” of God’s good gifts. We also need to “give back.”

— How will this week's Scriptures and current societal events impact the way I think, live, love—and "give back"—during the week ahead?

For Inspirational Viewing / Listening / Reading

Book:

[The Secret Chord](#) by [Geraldine Brooks](#)

The lives of Kings David and his son Solomon. Beautifully written but not a quick read, this novel offers a spiritually rewarding opportunity for those seeking deeper understanding of the Hebrew Scriptures and that pivotal period of our spiritual ancestors' history (ca. 1000-900 BC/BCE).

Article:

[How Do Christians Fit Into the Two-Party System? They Don't.](#)

Historical Christian positions on social issues don't easily match up with contemporary political alignments.

Online article by [Timothy Keller](#), Op-Ed Writer, *New York Times*, Sept. 29, 2018

Watch:

[Video](#): How the spilling of Jesus' blood fulfills the meaning of Jewish high holidays, by [Rabbi Kirt Schneider](#) (19 min)

In this video, Christian Rabbi Schneider shows how Jesus completed the meaning of high holiday Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement).

Jews regard [Yom Kippur](#) as the "Sabbath of Sabbaths." On this feast day, Jews ask forgiveness of their sins. Yom Kippur follows and completes the annual period known in Judaism as the High Holy Days or *Yamim Nora'im* ("Days of Awe") that commence with [Rosh Hashanah](#) ("A Day of Shouting or Blasting"). It also marks the beginning of New Year on the ancient Jewish calendar.

Listen:

[Yom Kippur](#), performed by the world renowned male sextet, [Six13](#) (3 min.)

Preview of Next Session

28th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Isaiah 25: 6-10 "On this mountain, the Lord of hosts will provide for all peoples a feast."

Psalms 23: 1-6 "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. . . ."

Philippians 4: 12-14, 19-20 "My God will fully supply whatever you need. . . ."

Matthew 22: 1-14 “The kingdom may be likened to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son.”

Closing Prayer

(edited and abridged for use here)

Prayer before an election

Lord God, as election day approaches, help me to better understand the issues and concerns that confront our country and how the Gospel compels us to respond as faithful citizens of our community.

I ask for eyes free from blindness to see others as brothers and sisters, equal in dignity, especially those innocent victims of abuse and violence, deceit and poverty.

Give me ears to hear the cries of abandoned children and those men and women oppressed because of race or creed, religion or gender.

I ask for a mind and heart open to distinguishing the voices of leaders who will bring us closer to your Kingdom.

I pray for discernment that I may choose leaders open to hearing your Word, living your love, and keeping to the ways of your truth.

I ask this in the name of your Son Jesus Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Source: [U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops](#)

Questions?

Send any questions or comments you might have to algarrotto@comcast.net

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