

27th Sunday in Ordinary Time - A

Note: Where a Scripture text is underlined in the body of this discussion, it is recommended that the reader look up and read that passage.

1st Reading - Isaiah 5:1-7

Our reading for today has been titled “Song of the Lord’s Vineyard.” It is believed to have been composed during the early years of Isaiah’s ministry. This poem takes the form of a popular ballad that one might sing at a vintage festival. It is possible that Isaiah himself sang the song on one of these occasions, most likely the feast of Tabernacles.

The song is a skillfully concocted parable which hints at unrequited love as it contrasts the care lavished by Yahweh with His people’s sinful response (their social crimes), and speaks of judgment to come.

^{5:1} Let me now sing of my friend, my friend's song concerning his vineyard.

Isaiah calls God “friend” which conceals His identity. This gives a personal dimension to the betrayal.

My friend had a vineyard on a fertile hillside; ² He spaded it, cleared it of stones, and planted the choicest vines; Within it he built a watchtower, and hewed out a wine press.

With the stones dug from the field, the vine grower built a fence and watchtower for the protection of his property. The stones were also used to erect terrace walls along the slope of the hillside, making intensive cultivation possible. The terraces were thus leveled for planting, a common sight in Palestine today. Despite all this care, the vineyard yielded only grapes unfit for eating.

Then he looked for the crop of grapes, but what it yielded was wild grapes.

Not really wild ones, but rotten ones. The root of the Hebrew word used here means “to stink.”

³ Now, inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard:

If the parable is properly constructed the hearers will be able to pass judgment, which is what the speaker intends.

⁴ 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? ⁵ Now, I will let you know what I mean to do to my vineyard: Take away its hedge, give it to grazing, break through its wall, let it be

trampled! ⁶ 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.

Future devastation is what awaits the nation. Notice that after seemingly normal condemnation of the vine, the tone becomes divine: “I will command the clouds.”

⁷ The vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are his cherished plant;

This clearly reveals that the song is a parable.

He looked for judgment, but see, bloodshed! for justice, but hark, the outcry!

The final half of the verse contains a play on words which is lost in translation – it uses words that sound alike but have radically different meanings: *mispat* and *sedaqa* (judgement and justice) are what are looked for, *mispah* and *seaqa* (bloodshed and outcry) are what are found.

2nd Reading - Philippians 4:6-9

Saint Paul’s letter to the Philippians is not to correct abuses, but simply a letter of love and encouragement. Today we hear him offer counsels of harmony, joy, and peace. Let’s back up two verses in order to better gain the context and continuity of the reading.

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always. I shall say it again: rejoice! ⁵ Your kindness should be known to all. The Lord is near.

Saint Paul knows that his time on earth is drawing to a close and he hopes to meet Jesus. He echoes the prayer of the early Church *marana tha*. This assurance should form the foundation of the Philippian Christian’s forbearance.

⁶ Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God. ⁷ Then the peace of God

The peace that God gives is His own: like a watchman it will stand guard over the hearts and minds of Christians.

“‘Have no anxiety at all.’ This means: Do not be concerned for yourselves. Do not give unnecessary thought to or be anxious about the world or worldly things. For all that is needful for you in this life God provides. And it will be even better in that life which is eternal.” [Marius Victorinus (ca. A.D. 355), *Epistle to the Philippians* 4,6]

that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

This can be either because man simply can't comprehend it, or because it is such a state of serenity that it surpasses all human efforts to attain it.

⁸ Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious,

Paul is recommending to this community, who must bear witness to the whole world, a set of distinctively Greek (stoic) virtues.

“Whatever is true’ – What are these ‘true’ things? They are set out in the gospel: Jesus Christ is the Son of God and all that goes with that good news. When your thoughts are true, it follows that they will be ‘honorable.’ What is true is not corrupted, which means that it is honorable. What is not corrupted is true. Then what is true and honorable will also be ‘just,’ for it is made just or ‘justified.’ And what is made just is pure since it receives ‘sanctification’ from God. All that is ‘just, honorable, true and pure’ is ‘lovable’ and also ‘gracious.’ For who does not love these saintly virtues? Who does not speak and think well of them? ... Of this list some items pertain to true virtue in itself, while the later ones pertain to the fruit of virtue. To virtue it belongs to love ‘truth, honor, justice and purity.’ To the fruit of virtue belongs that which is ‘lovely and gracious.’ [Marius Victorinus (ca. A.D. 355), *Epistle to the Philippians* 4,8-9]

if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

⁹ Keep on doing what you have learned and received and heard and seen in me.

Paul speaks as if all these things represent what has been seen and heard in him. If they pursue such things, then the God of peace will be with them. We are all called to imitate the saints in what we do and say.

“He sees that it is impossible to give precise instructions about everything – their going out, their coming in, their words, their inner condition and their company. All of these a Christian must think about in context. He says concisely and as it were in a nutshell, ‘Just do what you have heard and seen me do.’” Saint John Chrysostom (between. A.D. 398-404), *Homilies on the Epistle to the Philippians* 16,4,10-14]

Then the God of peace will be with you.

“God of peace” is a common formula in Saint Paul’s writings. God is the source of all salvation. Sanctification is not only the will of God, but also His work.

Gospel - Matthew 21:33-43

As we heard last week, Jesus is in Jerusalem for His passion, death and resurrection. Last week we heard Him illustrate the source of His authority – baptism by John which showed that His authority comes from heaven. This week we continue from where we left off last week as He illustrates with another parable; the first part of this one reflects our first reading.

[Jesus said to the chief priests and the elders of the people:] ³³ "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.

The landowner is an absentee landlord. In the New Testament world, such disputes between landlords and tenants were not unknown. Again, recall that in a parable the vineyard is representative of God's chosen people.

³⁴ When vintage time drew near,

Time for the harvest, time to rally the faithful.

he sent his servants to the tenants to obtain his produce.

The servants are the prophets.

³⁵ But the tenants seized the servants and one they beat, another they killed, and a third they stoned. ³⁶ Again he sent other servants, more numerous than the first ones, but they treated them in the same way. ³⁷ Finally, he sent his son to them, thinking, 'They will respect my son.'

The son is Jesus.

³⁸ 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.'

When someone died without an heir, the property became unoccupied land that went to the first claimant. The tenants had the first opportunity to claim by occupation (adverse possession). Here, the tenants leap to an unreal conclusion as the owner is still around and can punish them.

³⁹ They seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him.

Jesus was crucified outside the walls of the city.

⁴⁰ What will the owner of the vineyard do to those tenants when he comes?" ⁴¹ 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."

It is ironic that the chief priests, who are incriminated by the story, give the harsh answer.

⁴² Jesus said to them, "Did you never read in 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'?"

Psalm 118:22-23.

⁴³ 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.

The Church founded on Peter by Jesus. Peter and the apostles are the foundation, Jesus is the cornerstone which keeps the structure from collapsing (Ephesians 2:20).

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