



Welcome to our Eucharistic Celebration

## The Twenty-Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

October 8, 2017

St. Mary of the Assumption

### Today's Themes in Scripture

Today's Scriptures begin with a passage from Isaiah in which the prophet employs a song to get the people's attention. His song tells the story of a "friend" who plants a vineyard, then with great dedication commits himself to doing everything possible to ensure the success of his crop. Yet despite his care and attention, the vineyard fails to produce the crop he had hope for. Instead, his carefully tended fields yielded only wild grapes, a disastrous waste of his investment of time, energy, and care.

Isaiah ended his song with questions for his listeners: What more could the vineyard owner have done to ensure a fruitful harvest? When tended so carefully, why did his grapes grow wild? When Isaiah continued the story of the vineyard owner, he told of the owner's great disappointment and determination to abandon the vineyard, to let it continue to grow wild until the land, once worked with great care and dedication, was ruined. His story complete, Isaiah told the people that God is the vineyard owner and they were the vineyard in which he labored for such disappointing results. Israel, through its unfaithfulness, had not grown as God intended but had gone wild, useless for his plans.

Today's Psalm continues the theme of a vineyard. The Psalmist acknowledged how tenderly God once cared for his people who now find themselves broken, vulnerable, and exploited. He prayed for God to come again and save what he had once planned and planted, and to restore new life to what is ruin.

In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus continues to address the Jewish religious authorities with a parable about a vineyard owner. His audience, familiar with the Scriptures, would have immediately recognized that a parable about a vineyard conveyed a message about God and his people. In Jesus' story, the vineyard owner entrusted his vineyard to tenants, who were to work the land on his behalf, and share the bounty of its harvest with him. Instead, the tenants refused to give the owner his due. The owner repeatedly attempted to collect what the tenants owed him, but each time, they abused and killed the owner's representatives, including his son and heir. When his parable was over, Jesus also posed a question of his audience: given the tenants' breach of contract with the vineyard owner, and how heinously they had behaved toward his representatives, what response could the tenants expect from the powerful vineyard owner?

The elders acknowledged that the tenants could only expect death. When Jesus heard their answer, he issued more warnings to them. The vineyard owner would find new tenants to replace the faithless, wicked ones. He will make a new covenant with other people. The vineyard owner's son, who would be rejected and killed, would become the cornerstone of God's rebuilt vineyard.

### Sunday Readings and Backgrounds

#### Reading I: Isaiah 5:1-7

**Israel is the vineyard of the Lord.**

- The first 39 chapters of the Book of Isaiah are called First Isaiah.
- First Isaiah preaches about faithfulness to God and Salvation.
- In today's passage Isaiah sings a story about an unfruitful vineyard.

#### Responsorial Psalm: Ps. 80: 9, 12, 13-14, 15-16, 19-20 (Isaiah 5: 7a).

**The vineyard of the Lord is the house of Israel.**

#### Reading II: Philippians 4:6-9

**Present your needs to God.**

- In the Letter to the Philippians, Paul gives advice for Christian living.
- Christians are to imitate Christ and to live according to what he has taught them.
- The harvest would come, not from their worry but from their prayer and trusting labor.

#### Gospel: Matthew 21:33-43

**They killed even the son.**

- The Gospel is another parable about a vineyard.
- In this story, the problem was not the vineyard itself, but those entrusted with its care.
- Jesus' hearers knew on whom the judgment fell; the chief priests and the Pharisees.

Reprinted with permission. LifelongCatechesis.OSV.org.



# Produce Fruit

Our northern hemisphere is in the full-throttled advance of a school year well begun, autumn leaves are beginning their annual exhibition of color and the Christmas season is still blessedly distant. Everything is in full gear. In contrast, the church year has started down-shifting toward the end of the year. The readings begin to sound an apocalyptic tone as the focus turns toward the end-times. The parables and stories Matthew will tell us from now through November are all situated in the last week of Jesus' life, a detail that tells us to listen to them with a particular urgency.

Today's parable of the landowner and tenants used a situation familiar to the audience. A wealthy landowner wanted his due, the tenants rebelled and got the crazy idea that if they eliminated the owner's servants and son, they would be the winners taking all. Jesus wove this tale as an indictment of religious leaders who rebelled against God and ignored all the servants sent to call them to task. We can easily apply Jesus' parable to church and state leaders, critiquing their lack of faithful stewardship. But, like it or not, using a parable to point a finger at another is a self-righteous distortion of Jesus' message. He wouldn't tolerate it from us anymore than he did from his contemporaries.

If we have the courage to listen for a Gospel message and not just seek self-affirmation, we must ask how this applies to us and not just to authorities. Suppose we listen to Isaiah's song of the vineyard as a depiction of God's vantage point on human life and the earth we have been given. We hear of God's tenderness for all of creation, the loving gaze with which God watches over evolution with all its green growth and painful transformations. We then hear of God's heartbreak. The wild grapes of bitterness and discord sprout where all had been designed to bring forth fruit to transform into the good wine of joy and harmony.

When we listen to the parable of the mutinous tenants, instead of thinking of "those people," suppose we heard it addressed to all of us as the stewards of our earth. What would happen if we interpreted this parable through the lens of Pope Francis' encyclical "*Laudato Si'*, on Care for Our Common Home"?

Francis tells us that God's vineyard, our sister Earth, is crying out to us "because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her" (LS #2). There can hardly be a more direct way of implicating us as tenants just like those in Jesus' parable.

Jesus told the story of tenants who had forgotten who they were. Instead of acting like servants or collaborators with the owner, they decided that they should be the sole masters, beholden to no one, privileged to eliminate anyone who got in their way. Francis describes our misguided understanding of our relationship to the Earth saying, "We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will. The violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life" (#2).

Francis warns us that we have disrupted the harmony between the Creator, humanity and creation "by our presuming to take the place of God and refusing to acknowledge our creaturely limitations" (#66). As a result, the originally harmonious relationship between human beings and nature became conflictual (#66). When Jesus asked the chief priests and Pharisees what the owner would do to his tenants, they answered, "He will put those wretched men to a wretched death and lease his vineyard to other tenants." Jesus softened their verdict. He said, "The kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that will produce its fruit."

Jesus didn't call for the elimination of the rebellious tenants, but for others to take their place and do what needed to be done. Francis tells us: "The Creator does not abandon us; he never forsakes his loving plan or repents of having created us. Humanity still has the ability to work together in building our common home" (#13).

This week's readings ask us how we are tending God's creation. In his September 1, 2015 letter establishing a "World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation," Francis tells us that today's ecological crisis is a summons to profound interior conversion. Calling us to become a people who produce the fruit of the kingdom of God, he says: "Living our vocation to be protectors of God's handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience." There is still time.

**Written by Mary McGlone. Reprinted with permission of the publisher. Celebration Publications. September, 2017.**