

Twenty-Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time Cycle A October 8, 2017

-Well here we are already beginning the second week of October - the new school year well begun, autumn leaves are just beginning their annual exhibition of color, the air is cooler, and the Christmas season is still – thankfully - distant.

-The church year/the liturgical year has started down-shifting toward its end. 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 some urgency.

-Today's Gospel builds on last Sunday's. You remember the parable of the two sons – one did the will of the father and worked in the vineyard, the other did not; In that story Jesus accused the leaders of Israel of not being faithful to God's call. They had promised to serve God, but instead they pursued their own agenda.

-In this week's parable of the Tenants, Jesus continues his indictment of those hypocritical leaders. They had not only failed to keep their promise; they had obstructed God's plan with violence.

-Jesus knew what happened to John the Baptist and to many of the prophets before him; and he knew the religious leaders were looking for a way to arrest him, as well.

-Parables about a landowner and tenants used a situation familiar to the audience. The hills of Galilee were lined with numerous vineyards, and it was quite common for the owners to let out their estates to tenants.

-Jesus's audience and Matthews as well would have also been familiar with our First Reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah – what is called the “Song of the Vineyard”.

-The vineyard of Israel, loved, cared for, looked after by God, was meant to produce good grapes of justice and righteousness, but instead produced wild grapes of bloodshed and outcry.

-God threatens to abandon the vineyard to drought, weeds, and wild animals unless Israel starts to yield good fruit.

-But of course, God does not do that – instead God – who is Love - sends his only Son, Jesus Christ, to save and redeem them and all of us: The stone rejected by the builders, becomes the cornerstone.

-The parables of Jesus and the words of Isaiah must never be used to point fingers at others. To do so would be a distortion of Jesus' message. Rather we must have the courage to ask how these challenging readings apply to us today.

-Suppose we listen to Isaiah's Song of the Vineyard as a depiction of God's vantage point on humanity and the way we live and treat each other, today?

-We hear of God's love and care for us, His tenderness for all of creation; we know of the many gifts and advantages we have today.

-We then hear of God's heartbreak. Wild grapes of bitterness and discord and violence sprout where God had expected good fruit and good wine – wine that could intoxicate this world with joy and harmony and love of neighbor, most especially by helping those in need.

-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.

-Maybe for us the vineyard is the zip code where we live? Are we producing fruit for the vineyard in our hometown? Are we in all our actions helping to build up the Kingdom of God?

-As we were reminded a week ago, we are confronted with untold acts of violence – The worst mass shooting in modern American history occurred last Sunday night – October 1. What is October 1, Respect Life Sunday. What a terrible desecration. We were also inspired by the heroic witness of so many risking their lives to save others from the gunfire in Las Vegas.

-In the midst of all of this, we are called to propose and to re-propose the Gospel of Jesus Christ in our lives, and in the lives of all those we encounter.

-Thomas Merton once wrote: “A witness of a crime, who stands by and makes a mental note of the fact, that he is an innocent bystander, tends by that very fact to become an accomplice.”

-In the vineyard of the world today, we witness terrible violence, we see widespread poverty, we see injustice, racism, we hear the silent screams of the voiceless. Do we make mental notes of these crimes, or are we stirred to action in some concrete way?

-Just over a week ago, Pope Francis launched a 2-year campaign to reach out to the refugees and migrants of the world. He is calling on Catholics, Christians, people of other religions and people of goodwill to work together for the good of our sisters and brothers throughout the world who have fled their homes in desperation: Men, women, and so many children, fleeing danger, exploitation, and persecution.

-He invites us, here in the United States, to consider how Jesus would expect us to respond to these desperate children of God and share their journey.

-The Pope reminds us “Each person is precious; persons are more important than things, and the worth of an institution is measured by the way it treats the life and dignity of human beings, particularly when they are vulnerable ...”

-These words are particularly relevant for us now, during Respect Life Month, as we remember that our Catholic faith upholds the life and dignity of all people at all stages.

-Cardinal DiNardo of Huston, the President of the USCCB said last Monday in the wake of the shooting, that the only response to evil is to do good. Are we responding to the Lord’s invitation today, with works of justice, love, peace, charity, respect for others? Or are we – more or less - killing the messengers?

-In the face of so much that is wrong in the world let us be moved as St Paul urges the Philippians in the Second Reading, to recommit ourselves to a life that is true, honorable, just, pure, holy, gracious, and that strives for excellence.

At this Eucharist, we ask God for the passion we need to live in the garden where he has planted us, in the zip code where we live, and for the determination to accept responsibility to produce a good yield in the vineyard of our world.