

**ECHOING GOD'S WORD
IN
THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY**

**OCTOBER 8, 2023
TWENTY-SEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME**

SCRIPTURES:

Isaiah 5:1-7

What more could God have done for his people?

Philippians 4:6-9

Worry or anxiety does no good for the Church.

Matthew 21:33-43

Jesus speaks of a new vineyard of farmers.

SCRIPTURE BACKGROUND:

Matthew:

Jesus addressed a people who felt very secure that God had entrusted to them, and to them alone, responsibility for God's promises in the world. The Jewish community had failed to produce the results that God had expected from them. By disobedience to God's law, by worldly maneuverings, and by compromising alliances with foreign nations, they had abandoned the purity of their heritage and the purposes for which they had been established as a people belonging especially to God. Now, under military occupation at the hands of the Romans, many were seeking a religious renewal consisting of stricter adherence to ritual laws. Jesus would have them know that this is not the kind of *harvest* that the Lord intends. Knowing full well that the leaders of Judaism are plotting to have him killed, Jesus makes it clear that they will be killing the Son of God when they cry out for his crucifixion. His ultimate threat is that God will choose some outside the nation of Israel who, it is hoped, will be more faithful.

On another level, Matthew reconstructs this scene in terms of the struggle going on within the Jewish community 50 years after the death of Jesus. Most have not accepted Jesus as the messenger sent from God, a messenger who was in fact God's very Son. There is a small Jewish community, those around Matthew, who have come to see that God wanted them to serve him according to the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. The larger part of the Jews have rejected Jesus and continue to do so. Already, God has been calling some Gentiles to become responsible for the promises also. *Other tenant farmers* are being summoned to become responsible. God places more hope in these *others* than in the ones who failed to produce the expected harvest.

Modern vineyards in the West are not as labor-intensive as the one described in the parable. Only in the Middle East are there still some vineyards cultivated with great difficulty on rocky hillsides, with the vines literally hanging on rocky supports which provide reserves of warmth into the coolness of the night; rocky cliffs that provide support to the vines so these will not touch the ground, sparse of soil but still able to rot out those leaves that touch the damp soil. The soil is not very abundant and must be carefully gathered around the roots of the individual vines if there is to be any growth at all. Vineyard farmers in such an environment have to love their work in order to put so much industry into it. The ultimate failure of this people is that they have been so greedy with God's gifts. They have wanted all for their own benefit rather than for God's glory. Stewardship has given way to a narrow sense of ownership and to selfishness.

Isaiah:

How generous God has been to the city of Jerusalem and its inhabitants! God has favored these people; God has purified them of all contamination; God has protected them from predators; God has done everything that an industrious vineyard farmer would do for his vineyard. With what results? Wild grapes! Useless and unproductive vineyard! God will withdraw the divine protection. Jerusalem will be devastated and destroyed. Babylon is even now preparing to invade, to plunder, to murder, and to deport the population. Such will be the consequences of Jerusalem's infidelity. How poignant this song is from the great Isaiah of Jerusalem! To this very day, it echoes the distress of the loving God who has found only negative responses from the hearts of the people he has favored.

Philippians:

Paul writes with loving advice for this valued community of Christians from whom he had been forced to depart too suddenly. They need to mend the divisions, to reconcile the factions, to ground their unity in the spirit of Jesus Christ, for they are given a great charge. It is from Philippi that Christianity will spread to the European continent and from there to the whole world. Paul loves this community and would have it become a shining witness for all the world.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Do you have a sense that some members of the Church are there just for the benefits? For their personal salvation? For what they can get spiritually out of going to church? What percentage of members, in your estimation, lack a clear sense of personal responsibility for the ministries and the works of the parish?
2. What would you suggest should be done to help the average parishioner become more aware of his/her responsibility for bringing in the harvest for God? Is there an effective way to teach stewardship of time and talent in the service of God? What is being done in your parish to recruit more workers for the vineyard of the Lord?
3. Do you think there are too few who do too much so that others do not see that there is any room for them in the service of the church community?

SUGGESTION FOR CHRISTIAN ACTION

Take a walk around your neighborhood. Look at the homes, the shops, the banks, the industries, the people. Put a big mental label on the whole thing: **THIS IS THE VINEYARD OF THE LORD**. Try to decide where in this environment God has called you to become responsible.

PRAYER

Almighty God,
let the Eucharist we share
fill us with your life.
May the love of Christ
that we celebrate here
touch our lives and lead us to you.

CATHOLIC PASTORAL PRACTICES

Some misguided individuals have argued against the use of real wine in the celebration of the Eucharist. The Catholic Church has never been moved by these arguments against the use of wine in the celebration of the Eucharist. In fact, among Protestants, it is only during the last 150 years that any concern has surfaced on this issue. Some conservative Protestants began to abstain from the use of all alcoholic beverages when the Industrial Revolution brought about massive social dislocations, and alcoholism became a social evil. Some went so far as to teach that all uses of alcohol were inherently evil. In the Catholic tradition, we have not stopped using wine at the Eucharist. For several centuries, Communion from the cup was withheld from the faithful, but that had more to do with doctrinal challenges to the Church's teaching on the Real Presence than with any concern over the use of alcohol. It had become a privilege reserved to the clergy to receive from the cup up until Vatican II (1963-65).

Some priests who have been diagnosed as suffering from alcoholism have been given permission by the Holy See to use grape juice in their chalice at the altar. But, wine remains the element consecrated for the Communion of the assembly, even at a Mass presided over by a priest who is recovering from alcoholism. There are perhaps as many as 10,000 priests who suffer from this disease in the United States and Canada. Most of these priests use the privilege of having grape juice for their own Communion. Officially, the documents from the Holy See refer to this substance as *mustum*. That is a Latin expression for the juice of newly pressed grapes, not yet fully fermented. (That word sounds very strange North American ears! I prefer to use only the expression *grape juice*. Just good, old, reliable, Welch's white!)

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