

Homily of Twenty-Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time of Year A, 2020

Isaiah 5:1-7; Psalm 80:9, 12-16; Philippians 4:6-9; Matthew 21:33-43

The first reading is a parable and Isaiah's prophecy of the conquest of Jerusalem and Judah by Assyria in 701 BC, which was God's punishment to the Israelites for their ingratitude and godlessness. Judah was God's cherished vineyard that produced wild grapes instead of good grapes. Instead of judgement and justice, there were bloodshed and outcry from the oppressed.

In the Gospel, Jesus told the chief priests and the elders a parable about the tenants who rebelled against the landowner. They assaulted and killed the landowner's servants. They also killed his son. Jesus presented this parable as a prophesy about himself, concerning his rejection by the chief priests and the elders, and his crucifixion by them. Jesus ended the parable with a quotation from Psalm 118:22, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone."

Builders at the time of Jesus used stones to form pillars for buildings. Not every stone was suitable for forming pillars. A special kind of stone was used. Jesus referred to himself as the special stone which the chief priests and the elders rejected.

Many countries and their rulers are like the vineyard of God in the first reading, and the wicked and ungrateful tenants in the Gospel reading. God blessed the countries with resources to benefit the citizens. Instead of good judgement and justice, what we see are greed, corruption, bloodshed and outcry. In those places, human being turned God's blessings to curses. We pray that God raises up 'Assyria' to rescue his oppressed children.

God gave human being a beautiful world and the authority to subdue everything in the world. Then, human being turn against God and reject him. In many places, God is removed from politics, administration, judiciary, economy, business, science, technology, morality, education, mass media, medicine, family, and religion. I mention religion because some religious leaders and their followers worship mammon rather than God. It was Aristotle who said that nature abhors a vacuum. When God is removed, someone else takes over, and that is the Evil One. Any place, government, country, community, institution, family, religion, or individual where God and Jesus are removed, the Evil One takes over. The result is, 'wild grapes' in form of sufferings and crimes.

In one way or another, we all are God's vineyards (as in the first reading), and his tenants (as in the Gospel reading). As vineyards who have received so much blessings from God, we are to be grateful to him; and we are to bear good fruits. As tenants (stewards) we are to be productive and accountable. We are not to be destructive, rebellious, and unaccountable.

St. Paul, in the second reading, gives us a guide to bearing good fruits, to being productive, and to being accountable. He tells us to keep before us "whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, and if there is anything worthy of praise."

Finally, as stewards of God's work, let Jesus be our cornerstone; in good times and in bad times, in sickness and in good health, in riches and in poverty, in joy and in sorrow, in happiness and in sadness, and in want and in plenty. In all circumstances, let Jesus be our cornerstone. If Jesus is our cornerstone, St. Paul tells us in the second reading, "Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God. Then, the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and mind." Amen.

A praise song that acknowledges Jesus as the cornerstone (pillar) says,

You are the pillar that holds my life.

You are the pillar that holds my life.

Master Jesus, you're the pillar that holds my life.

Master Jesus, you're the pillar that holds my life.

Fr. Martin Eke, MSP