

Homily of Twenty-Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time of Year A, 2023

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. Jesus is the cornerstone of salvation rejected by the chief priests and the elders. Whoever rejects Jesus Christ, the cornerstone of salvation, labors and builds in vain (Psalm 127:1). Jesus says, "For apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5).

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 beings turn God's blessings into curses and tragedies. May God rescue his oppressed children.

Also, we know many instances of individuals who are architects of their own self-destruction. Due to greed and vanity, they turn from cherished vineyard to wild vineyard and produce wild grapes instead of good grapes.

God gave human beings a beautiful world and the authority to subdue everything in it. Then human beings rebel against God and reject him. In many places, God is removed from politics, administration, judiciary, economy, business, science, technology, education, mass media, medicine, family, and religion. Religion is included because some people worship mammon and Satan instead of God.

We are God's vineyards (first reading) and his tenants (gospel reading). As vineyards who have received so many 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. Jesus says, "Much will be required of the person entrusted with much, and still more will be demanded of the person entrusted with more" (Luke 12:48).

In the second reading, St. Paul gives us a guide to bear good fruits, to be productive, and to be accountable. He tells us to keep before us and to pursue "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" (Philippians 4:8).

Finally, St. Paul encourages us that as stewards of God's work, "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 minds" (Philippians 4:6). Amen.

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