

FR. JOHN'S HOMILY

Twenty-Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time, October 4, 2020

We are God's people with gifts freely given and we are called to use them for building up God's Kingdom. When such statements about the mysteries of God are made, I used to think about God's reign in the future, actually a place that awaits me/us. Now when I think about the treasure God has given me, I look within.

For from within reigns the mysteriousness of God. This began at our Baptism. You hear about the parables of God's mysteries in the analogies used, like the mustard seed, wedding feast, shepherd and his sheep, fishing net, and even a vineyard. Today our scripture concerns the mystery of a vineyard and we again think within ourselves as having the vineyard within.

Now listen to Isaiah. The First Reading compares God's people to a vineyard that has yielded bad grapes. All that lovingly labor -- the soil carefully prepared, the hillside well-chosen, the selected vine stock planted, the hedge to keep out the wild animals, the tower and the wine-press, were all loving prepared. God has lovingly protected his people, and they have rendered only sour grapes, things like violence and oppression. The vineyard of God is about love, peace, justice, truth, hope, joy, unity, light, mercy, etc.

Bad grapes represent: violence, injustice, anger, accusation, greed, riots, abuse, etc. Sounds very familiar with what is happening in our world today. So Isaiah prophesied that God has been patient long enough. There has been plenty of time for good produce, but there is only bad. So now it is time to destroy the vineyard.

We must remember that God did not have to create the vineyard, it was not necessary for Him. And yet, He created and tended it out of His love. He had chosen a people for himself. All the conditions were there for God to see and

witness a people after His own heart. Yet, they were unfaithful, and now it is time for the vineyard to be destroyed. Except, Isaiah tells us later that there is hope that God will save a remnant and they can rebuild after the destruction, after the judgement. There is always hope.

Jesus uses the same imagery in our parable today, but his emphasis is very different. For Jesus, the problem lies not with the vineyard but with the tenant-farmers. Think of ourselves as tenant farmers with God's vineyards within. The tenants do not please the landowner. They do not please God. They do not give the land-owner his due. Is our heart giving God His rightly due? Such share-cropping arrangements with the landowner and the tenants splitting the produce were normal agricultural business practice in Jesus' time.

However, when the tenants beat up and kill the master's agents, this is not what the Landowner, God, expected from His people. The master's agents are the prophets of old, whom the people of God ignored. God sent prophet after prophet to call His people back into right relationship. This is not an unjust landlord. The tenants' motive is pure greed; they want the vineyard for themselves. They even kill the owner's son and heir. And this is clear reference to Jesus who was taken outside the walls and killed. Time has come and now these tenant farmers will lose everything.

God's will gets new tenants who will live in a way that pleases Him. We are those new tenants. Is God pleased with how we are tending his vineyard, or has sour, bad grapes found their way within us?

The key to all of this is Jesus, the son in the parable, who was thrown out of the vineyard and killed. Jesus was killed outside the city, outside the vineyard of the Lord, except Jesus is the vineyard. So the tenant's farmers get rid of the very source of life that can save them.

However, Jesus is referred to as the keystone which holds the whole building together. The stone rejected by the builders is the stone which holds everything together. Without Jesus, the cornerstone, all life collapses. With Jesus in our lives, all work together for the good. Jesus, cast out of the vineyard, is the keystone who holds together the new building, the new temple of God, the vineyard of the Lord.

The world is rejecting Jesus. By rejecting His word, they are thereby settling for their own gods and creating their own words which is contrary to the Word of God. It is happening all around us, but is it also happening within us? That is the question.

Christ is the keystone, so often rejected, yet so necessary for our salvation and the salvation of all people. Without Christ, we cannot have life with God. So in the parable, the tenant's farmers' sin, is our own any time we reject Jesus and his words.

The parable invites us to turn to Christ again. It urges us not to reject Christ in our lives simply because we dislike the challenge of his message. The vineyard of the Lord is the House of Israel. We are the House of Israel and the vineyard lives within.

And the Good News is when the heart receives Him and lives for him, the vineyard can grow to abundant life. In my first visit to Rome back in 1988. one grace moment came at the Basilica of St. Clement. In the dome above the altar was a Mosaic image of a cross, with Jesus, and blood and water flowed down into living waters, and a vine was growing around circling the image. Upon the vine was many images of life, hope, resurrection. The title is "*I am the vine you are the branches*". This is so true with Jesus. We, the people of God, have life, and have life more abundantly. The vineyard of the Lord is the House of Israel. The vineyard of the Lord is you and me.