

HOMILY for 27th SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME – Year A

The Bible has used a lot of agricultural images to convey to us spiritual messages & connect us to the divine world. This Sunday's Readings are a great example to demonstrate that. The First Reading shares with us its spiritual message via an agricultural image as following, "Let me now sing of my friend, my friend's song concerning his vineyard. My friend had a vineyard on a fertile hillside; he spaded it, cleared it of stones, & planted the choicest vines; within it he built a watchtower, & hewed out a wine press. Then, he looked for the crop of grapes, but what it yielded was wild grapes. Now, inhabitants of Jerusalem & people of Judah, judge between me & my vineyard: What more was there to do for my vineyard that I had not done? Why, when I looked for the crop of grapes, did it bring forth wild grapes?" It continues, "Now, I will let you know what I mean to do to my vineyard: Take away its edge, give it to grazing, break through its wall, let it be trampled! Yes, I will make it a ruin."

This famous poem/song is a parable, like some of the parables of Jesus. The speaker does not at first disclose its true subject but leads his listeners to pass judgment before they realize that they are condemning themselves. The vineyard involves a double allegory. On the one hand, there is the obvious agricultural sense of the words. On the other hand, the fact that the song is said to be a love song, sung for a friend, suggests that the friend's vineyard is really his wife. There is a hint, then, of marital infidelity as a second level in the allegory. The song is not very explicit about the sins of Israel, except that they involve bloodshed & injustice. The indictment draws its force from the analogy with the unproductive vineyard & the less obvious analogy with marital infidelity. It appears that both kingdoms, Israel & Judah, stand accused.

There is yet another nuance to the allegory. The vineyard was very valuable property that contributed greatly to the life of luxury. It symbolized the wealth of the land. The parable suggests that this wealth has not produced a just society. The threat that the vineyard would be overgrown by thorns & briars was fulfilled rather literally after the Assyrian invasions. So, the poem used the analogy of marital infidelity to let the people of God know that God knows that God threatens to make the land a wilderness. That threat indeed came true with the Assyrian invasions as they leveled the entire country; including the Jerusalem Temple before enslaving the whole Jewish population.

Meanwhile, in this Sunday's Gospel, Jesus used another agricultural image to talk to us on how the world has misused God's gifts to it & rejected God's servants, including God's Son Himself. Here's how the Gospel says, "...There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a hedge around it, dug a wine press in it, & built a tower. Then, he leased it to the tenants & went on a journey. When vintage time drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants to obtain his produce. But, the tenants seized the servants; one they beat, another killed, and a third they stoned. And he sent other servants, more numerous than the first ones, but they treated them in the same way. Finally, he sent his son to them, thinking, 'They will respect my son.' But, when the tenants saw the son, they said to one another, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him & acquire his inheritance.' They seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, & killed him. What will the owner of the vineyard do to those tenants when he comes?"

That question & the other one of the First Reading "What more was there to do for my vineyard that I [the Lord] had not done?" are at the center of this Sunday's discussion. Both the first Reading & the Gospel tell us about God's blessings to the world via the image of the

vineyard. God has done everything possible to develop it & give it maximum possibilities to bear a successful harvest before handing it over to the people of God. Unfortunately, they have let God down & made it to bring forth "wild grapes" by being unfaithful to God & doing all kinds of other "sinful acts." They have not paid back their dues to God & treated God's servants with much respect. Instead, they mistreated & killed them. The people of God look like a bunch of irresponsible & rebellious hoodlums. They did not do a group job with what God has entrusted to them. They were not grateful & obedient to God's laws & teachings either. So, evidently God has regretted about the decision of handing God's blessings in the form of the vineyard to the people of God & expecting great result from it. However God has promised to hold them accountable for their actions. That leads to the second point that those readings want to remind us. That is, God will keep everyone responsible for what they had done & judge the whole world in the end. So, there will be a Judgment Day as far as God is concerned.

My dear brothers & sisters, it is sure difficult for us to see why we got to make good use of God's blessings for us & produce abundantly for God's Kingdom while the world does whatever it likes without fearing the consequences. But, today we're reminded that there will be a Judgment Day, & God will hold everyone responsible for their actions. So, we must act as a responsible steward of God & produce a good harvest for God's Kingdom. Let me leave with you this wise advice of Paul in today's Second Reading to help us achieve that goal: "...Brothers & sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence & if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing what you have learned & received & heard & seen in me. Then, the God of peace will be with you."