

27<sup>th</sup> Sunday per Annum  
Isaiah 5:1-7;  
Philippians 4:6-9;  
Matthew 21:33-43  
Little Flower - 10/8/17

My Brothers and Sisters,

The parable in today's Gospel is a parable of salvation history. William Barclay's commentary on this parable reminds us that "in interpreting a parable it is normally a first principle that every parable has only one point and that the details are not to be stressed. Normally to try to find a meaning for every detail is to make the mistake of treating the parable as an allegory. But in this case it is different. In this parable the details do have a meaning..."<sup>1</sup>

In this parable, the landowner is God. The vineyard is the people of Israel. The tenants are the leaders of the people. The servants of the landowner are the Old Testament prophets, who were often persecuted and killed. The son, of course, is Jesus. This parable, then, prophesies the death of Jesus and the New Covenant in Christ's blood.

Although Jesus promised that the New Covenant in his blood would be an everlasting covenant, the parable offers at least two challenges to us. By our baptism and confirmation, all of us are called to share in Jesus's ministry as teacher, priest, and shepherd. The parable reminds us that God will hold us accountable for how well we respond to his challenge to minister. To the extent that we are called to be Christian leaders, the parable challenges us to recognize that true Christian leadership is always, first of all, service to the people of God. True Christian leadership is never about position or power.

The second challenge of the parable is to be open to God's messengers, even when they are telling us what we do not want to hear. The role of the Old Testament prophets was not to predict the future but to interpret the present and challenge the people. True prophets almost inevitably make people uncomfortable. In the Old Testament, the conflict between the true and false prophets was very clear. The false prophets affirmed the people and their ways. The true prophets challenged them. We need to realize that God can call and choose anyone to be a prophet to us. Likewise, we need to realize that God can and does call us to be prophets to others.

Last Sunday was Respect Life Sunday. Since we celebrated the Feast of St. Therese last Sunday, I want to say just a few words today. Today God challenges us to be prophetic in word and action. This means we are called to proclaim, defend, and cherish the sanctity of all human life from the moment of conception to the moment of natural death. This is an area where the Catholic Church has been prophetic, especially with its emphasis on the "seamless garment" or consistent ethic of life. As we saw in the Las Vegas shooting and see constantly in Indianapolis, there is a wanton disrespect for life in our society today.

The reading from Isaiah also uses the image of a vineyard. It is an indictment not only of the leaders of Israel and Judah but also of the people of Israel and Judah. In this prophecy, God asks what more He could have done for his vineyard. He nurtured and cultivated it, but it only produced wild grapes. In other words, it did not produce good fruit. Therefore, God decided to destroy it, and we know that both Israel and Judah were conquered.

My brothers and sisters, we all know that a vineyard must be nurtured and cultivated. If we are the vineyard of God, our faith, love, and hope must be nurtured and cultivated as well. In this parish, we are blessed with many opportunities to enrich our faith. There are so many opportunities to deepen our love through service of others. To the extent that we choose to be joyful, optimistic, and life-giving, we foster hope both in others and in ourselves.

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<sup>1</sup>William Barclay, *Barclay's Daily Study Bible (NT)*, WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "The Vineyard of the Lord (Matt 21:33-46)."