

Who's watching the Vineyard?
27th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Sunday October 8th 2017
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Vineyards in the bible are meant to evoke images of careful cultivation by skilled workers called vintners with the expectation of fine harvests or vintages of wine. In today's First Reading Isaiah describes the misuse and abuse of the people of Israel by their leaders as being like vines ripe for cultivation and left unattended. The Lord had prepared Israel like a fine vineyard, and Israel's leaders like vintners with everything at their disposal to be fruitful and successful. What the Lord received instead were wild grapes. Grapes with no cultivation, left to grow or die by chance, depending on weather and other conditions, were not very good grapes. If anything good grew at all, it was not thanks to the vintners, and what grew in such an unfavorable situation was not worth much. The leaders of Israel were expected to cultivate justice and peace in their subjects, and they didn't. They felt entitled to something that didn't belong to them and rather than helping it grow, they watched it wither. What we are being taught today is the entitlement that envy and greed produces can lead to inaction. It can also lead to anxiety and anxiety can have the same effect. In moments of anxiety it's o.k. to ask God for what we need, but in a spirit of gratitude for what the Lord has already done. That's the best remedy to a warped sense of entitlement when things don't go as we'd like. Our Lord has promised us that the Heavenly Father knows what we need before we even ask, so there is no need to worry. If we occupy ourselves with truth, honor, justice, purity, loveliness, graciousness, and excellence, we'll not only experience the peace of God but help to spread it. This is incredibly important in our society today. Today, truth has given way to gossip without facts... producing confusion among the people. Honor has given way to shaming building inwardness. Purity has given way to immediate gratification and graciousness, a simple act of thankfulness, politeness or civility has been replaced with entitlement.... empowering individuals to believe their way is not just the right way, but the only way! Who's watching the vineyard today and what action are we taking!

In today's Gospel Our Lord invites us to imagine a group of men given the opportunity of a lifetime, both professionally and personally: not only a good place to live but a great way to make a living. Imagine a business at an excellent location, with an abundant clientele, a great lease, and the job of making a lot of people happy (the vineyard is for producing wine, throughout Scripture, symbolizes joy). If that weren't enough, the men running the business also have a beautiful place to live and a great landlord. Any outside observer would say that professionally and personally the owner has been very kind to his tenants, even going beyond what a tenant would expect or deserve. All the owner asks in return is a share of the joy that he hoped the tenants would produce. This is where the mystery of sin enters: mystery in the sense of sin, ultimately, following no logic but its own, a twisted logic that bends everything around it and denies greater truths eventually at its own expense. The tenants start beating up the people coming to collect the owner's fair share and leaving him empty handed. There's no remorse: gradually they start killing them too. The owner shows a kindness that the tenants, to any outside observer, do not deserve. He keeps giving them opportunities until one day he gives them the greatest and most definitive opportunity: he sends the heir himself, a reminder that he is the owner and they are the tenants, and an extension of his very self. In their twisted logic, they convince themselves that by eliminating the heir any trace of ownership will die with the owner, and he'll also stop bothering them (the son was the last one he could send, as the parable narrates). The chief priests, scribes, and elders pronounce judgment on this "theoretical" case, and their own words condemn what they are doing. Our Lord is the cornerstone. You can't even speak of having a structure, having a building, without a cornerstone—it joins two walls together. Many "tenants" who've received so much kindness, personally and professionally, from God want to monopolize the joy they could give to God and others, and as a result, impoverish any joy they could give. They deny something fundamental, something structural: that the owner and his heir are what make their life possible, whether they acknowledge it or not, and eventually, second chances (and third, and fourth, etc.) are exhausted, and mercy has to give way to justice. The parable of the wicked tenants in today's Gospel is a way of teaching the Pharisees that they had fallen into a warped sense of entitlement over something that didn't belong to them: the People of God. So when the Son comes on behalf of the true "owner" of the People

of God, they're going to reject him and kill him thinking that somehow everything will then return to normal. Our Lord today through the parable is prophesying the outcome of their covetousness and envy: everything they thought was theirs will be taken away and given to those who'll be worthy stewards of God's gifts. Anyone who rents knows the basics of being on good terms with your landlord: pay the rent in full and on time, don't be a nuisance to your neighbors, and keep your place clean. The alternative is late fees, eviction (forcible or otherwise), and lawsuits. The landlord in today's Gospel is incredibly patient with his tenants. That shows something deeper is going on. He cares about his tenants, above and beyond the call of duty, he gives them innumerable chances until he can give them no more. We are the vintners of our times.. God is looking for us to step up, to reveal the truth to a world that needs to hear it, to bring Honor to all individuals and to stand up for those who can't stand up for themselves. To embrace the theology of our bodies and elevate purity to an aspiration again rather than an old way of life... and to be thankful for every little thing that we have – to be “full of grace”

Those things don't just bring peace and joy into our lives, but also in those, we know and love. Let's consider today the kindness of God in our lives and ask him to help us to see how we can work with him to bring joy to him, to others, and to ourselves and to remember that God is the vine, we are the the branches, the vintners at work today and all who live in him will bear great fruit!