

Homily for October 8, 2017
27th Sunday in Ordinary Time
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Isaiah is about to sing us a song. It is a song about a vineyard. It is the same vineyard that we sang about in Psalm 80 our responsorial this morning. “The vineyard of the Lord is the house of Israel.” “A vine from Egypt you transplanted; you drove away the nations and planted it.” It is also the same vineyard that Jesus spoke of in the parable to the chief priests and elders of the people. God who is Isaiah’s friend planted the vine, put a hedge around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a tower. God, you see, owns the vineyard. He made the capital investment. He created the vineyard in much the same way that He created the Garden of Eden. He like the Vineyard in Jesus’ parable set stewards over the Garden. The Garden was supposed to be fruitful and multiply to produce the sweet wine of humanity but rather than the sweet wine Adam and Eve chose sour grapes. With the sour grapes, they themselves became sour in their souls and so were cast from the Garden leaving it to spoil, to run down and to decay. Still God did not abandon humanity. He promised a savior who would restore us to the vineyard.

Like the lyrics of “Big Yellow Taxi” an old song by Joni Mitchell, “Don’t it always seem to go that you don’t know what you got ‘til it’s gone. Paved paradise and put up a parking lot.” Adam and Eve immediately regretted their decision. Being the steward of the vineyard should have been enough and yet they had longed to own the Garden. Being made in the image and likeness of God should have been enough, yet they had longed to be God. After the fall, mankind often pleaded with God to restore us to the garden but each time from the Tower of Babel to Pentecost to today mankind becomes lost in the desire for power and authority, the desire to control. We lose our taste for the sweetness of God’s vine.

The house of Israel, the people of Judah continued to long for what our first parents lost, a return to the vineyard. Yet despite all the opportunities God gave them and us humanity regularly fails to hold on to him. Each time in our human weakness we choose the sour grapes. The psalmist cries out for his nation, “Once again, O Lord of hosts, look down from heaven, and see; take care of this vine. O Lord, God of hosts, restore us; if your face shine upon us, then we shall be saved.”

Jesus tells his parable to the leaders of Israel, to people who knew the writings of Isaiah, knew the prayer of psalm 80. At that time, they were the stewards of God’s temple of God’s word of God’s teaching and God’s law just as we are today. Jesus reminds them of all the opportunities God has given the people, of all the prophetic messengers that God has sent them throughout salvation history. But now, “Finally, he sent his own son to them, thinking, they will respect my son.” Unfortunately, they don’t believe, they don’t recognize the son, they do not want to give up power and authority over the garden, they refuse to take Jesus message of love to heart and their hearts, their souls remain sour.

And so, Jesus at the last supper, after his resurrection promises he will send others: He will send the Holy Spirit; He will send his disciples; He will send the fathers of the church; He will send us. Because, as we discovered in our readings just two short weeks ago, God never gives up on his people. Jesus after all is the cornerstone rejected by the earthly builders. He intends to rebuild the wall around the garden, to build a new tower and restore the vineyard to its past magnificence. He is the answer to Psalm 80’s plea, to mankind’s groaning to be restored. He tells us in chapter 15 of John’s gospel, “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower. I am the vine and you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing.” The produce of Jesus’ vineyard is his own blood, the fruit of the vine given for us, we are to be his

blood his love poured out on the world, on all humanity for all time. He will take the sourness of our souls and turn it sweet with the true drink of life. He will restore us to the garden.

How then do we remain in him so that we do not play out this same tragedy in our own souls today? How do we put aside our lust for power and authority, our desire to take control away from God and become like earthbound kings? Paul tells the Philippians, 'Put aside anxiety and fear, put on Christ through prayer and petition, with thanksgiving.' We can learn to sing a new song with our lives. We can become good grapes. We can be a sweet-smelling oblation to the Lord. Embrace "whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise," embrace these things. "The God of peace will be with you." The same message presented by God to all of mankind, since our first parents fell from the garden, in his goodness God continues to present to us. Yet as always for each of us, for mankind the choice remains, will we become good stewards allowing The Father in heaven to mold us and fashion us into a vineyard producing good grapes or will we choose to go our own way and pursue sour grapes?