**Readings for October 8, 2023 – 27th Sunday in Ordinary Time**

Planted in the Vineyard

*Jesus again teaches us in parables, using the image of the vineyard, a rich symbol for the people of God. In our second reading, we are reminded that trusting in a God who is bigger and wiser than us, brings us peace and helps us to recognize beauty and truth all around us.*

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**Opening Prayer:** Come Holy Spirit and shake me up! Transform my heart so that it more closely resembles the heart of Jesus. Let my baptism color my world so that I recognize you and your grace in all things. Amen

 - Adapted from Joe Paprocki, Loyola Press

**Reading 1** [**IS 5:1-7**](http://usccb.org/bible/isaiah/5%3A1)

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, and planted the choicest vines;
within it he built a watchtower, and hewed out a wine press.
Then he looked for the crop of grapes, but what it yielded was wild grapes. Now, inhabitants of Jerusalem and people of Judah,
judge between me and 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?
Now, I will let you know what I mean to do with my vineyard:
take away its hedge, give it to grazing, break through its wall, let it be trampled!
Yes, I will make it a ruin: it shall not be pruned or hoed,
but overgrown with thorns and briers; I will command the clouds
not to send rain upon it. The vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel,
and the people of Judah are his cherished plant; he looked for judgment, but see, bloodshed!
for justice, but hark, the outcry!

**Responsorial Psalm** [**PS 80:9, 12, 13-14, 15-16, 19-20**](http://usccb.org/bible/psalms/80%3A9)

R. (Is 5:7a)**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 put forth its foliage to the Sea, its shoots as far as the River.
R. **The vineyard of the Lord is the house of Israel.** Why have you broken down its walls, so that every passer-by plucks its fruit,
The boar from the forest lays it waste, and the beasts of the field feed upon it?
R. **The vineyard of the Lord is the house of Israel.**
Once again, O LORD of hosts, look down from heaven, and see; take care of this vine,
and protect what your right hand has planted the son of man whom you yourself made strong.
R. **The vineyard of the Lord is the house of Israel.**
Then we will no more withdraw from you; give us new life, and we will call upon your name.
O LORD, God of hosts, restore us; if your face shine upon us, then we shall be saved.
R. **The vineyard of the Lord is the house of Israel.**

**Reading 2** [**PHIL 4:6-9**](http://usccb.org/bible/philippians/4%3A6)

Brothers and sisters: Have no anxiety at all, but in everything,
by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God.
Then the peace of God that surpasses all understanding
will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers and sisters,
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,
think about these things.
Keep on doing what you have learned and received
and heard and seen in me. Then the God of peace will be with you.

**Gospel** [**MT 21:33-43**](http://usccb.org/bible/matthew/21%3A33)

Jesus said to the chief priests and the elders of the people:
"Hear another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard,
put a hedge around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a tower.
Then he leased it to tenants and 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 and one they beat, another they killed, and a third they stoned.
Again 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 and acquire his inheritance.’
They seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him.
What will the owner of the vineyard do to those tenants when he comes?"
They answered him, "He will put those wretched men to a wretched death and lease his vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the proper times."
Jesus said to them, "Did you never read in the Scriptures:
*The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone;
by the Lord has this been done, and it is wonderful in our eyes?*
Therefore, I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you
and given to a people that will produce its fruit."

Related Reflections

**The Wicked Tenants in the Vineyard:** Jesus uses many images to portray the kingdom of God. One of His favorites is that of the vineyard, which He again uses in today’s parable. Here, Jesus paints an image of His Church which is less than flattering. It is an image of a Church that has gone astray, a Church that is tended by those who think it is theirs to use at will, to bend to their own ends, and not to do the will of God-the true Master. This striking parable has reference, obviously, to the Jewish leaders of Jesus’s day who rejected Him, and would put Him to death. But there is more to this parable than condemnation of the Jewish leaders.

This parable has a message for all times, and especially for the Church today. The property owner in the parable is God the Father. The tenant farmers refer to the religious leaders whose job it is to serve the Church, unselfishly, not lording over the faithful as if they were their masters. The servants who were sent to obtain the Master’s “share of the grapes” represent the prophets and saints who labored to do the Lord’s will in His vineyard but were persecuted for their efforts by corrupt, religious leaders. The Son, whom God finally sent, is Jesus Christ who died on the cross for our sins. Jesus quotes the Old Testament scriptures which refer to Himself as the “cornerstone” of the new kingdom, but was rejected and continues to be rejected by corrupt religious leaders.

We have all been planted in the vineyard by God and we must all bear fruit for our stewardship in this vineyard. No one can presume to be the owner, the Master of this fruitful kingdom. There is only one Master, one owner, and that is almighty God. We are all called to be co-operative, fruitful workers in this church. The Church is the people of God, struggling to be faithful in a sinful world. Let us pray for our fragile Church which is made up of weak, human vessels, striving to be more than we are.

* Fr. Hugh Duffy – October, 2017 – published on fatherduffy.com

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**God’s Vineyard – An image of hope**

Vines are tended and grapes are picked in a vineyard. In ancient Israel grapes were a major agricultural product, used for eating and making wine. Throughout the biblical period the vineyard was part of everyday life for many in Israel. So it is not surprising that it became a biblical symbol for the people of God.

The most famous use of the vineyard symbolism in the Old Testament appears in Isaiah 5, where we are told, “The vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel.” In his “song” of the vineyard Isaiah recalls the careful and loving treatment that the owner (God) gave to his vineyard (Israel). Yet the vineyard yielded only wild grapes (sin and rebellion). Out of frustration the owner threatens to destroy the vineyard (by means of the Assyrian army) and make it into a ruin.

The historical context for Isaiah’s song of the vineyard was an attack expected against Jerusalem by the Assyrian army in the eighth century B.C. Isaiah foresaw that such an attack would have disastrous effects for Judah, just as an earlier attack had on the northern kingdom of Israel. The only way the disaster might be averted, according to Isaiah, was for Judah to put aside its sinful and rebellious ways, and to try once more to do God’s will as the chosen people of God. However, the way in which Isaiah’s song of the vineyard is expressed held out little hope for such a conversion.

The vineyard image also appears in today’s excerpts from Psalm 80. The psalmist describes Israel’s origin as God’s people in terms of a vine (“a vine from Egypt you transplanted”), comments on the sorry state of God’s vine and asks God once more to care for and protect his beloved vine. The psalmist very likely had in mind Judah’s experience of defeat and exile in the early sixth century B.C. Even though Isaiah’s warning had been fulfilled, the vine remained the object of God’s care.

The vineyard image appears also in Jesus’ parable in Matthew 21. As the text now stands, the parable is clearly a kind of allegory. The landowner is God, the vineyard is Israel as God’s special people, the tenants are the political and religious leaders of Israel, the harvest is the fullness of God’s kingdom and the judgment that will accompany it, the servants sent to collect the landowner’s produce are the prophets, and the landowner’s son is Jesus.

The parable begins by describing God’s extraordinary care for the vineyard in terms clearly alluding to Isaiah 5. When the tenants abuse the servants and the son, the owner comes and destroys the wicked tenants. In Matthew’s context this is very likely an allusion to the destruction of Jerusalem not only in 587 B.C. but also in A.D. 70. Note, however, that the vineyard itself is preserved and placed under new management. Note also that the chief priests and elders of the people recognize that the parable is being told about them. They need to be replaced as the leaders of God’s people.

These three vineyard texts insist that God remains in personal relationship with his people, continues to care for and preserve them and stays faithful even when the people fail to do so. Thus, the vineyard is an image of hope: it emphasizes God’s continuing care for his people. Christians believe that through Jesus’ life, death and resurrection the people of God have come under new and different leadership from that of the Jewish chief priests and elders. Nevertheless, through Jesus of Nazareth the church retains its historical and organic relationship with Israel as God’s people. The problem that Jesus and Matthew had was not with the owner (God) or the vineyard itself (God’s people). Rather, it was with the tenants (the leaders). The New Testament parable of the vineyard teaches us to look forward in hope to the fullness of God’s kingdom under the guidance of the risen Jesus as Emmanuel, the one who promises to be with us until the end of this age (Mt 28:20).

In the meantime, Paul’s advice to the Philippians can help us to promote peace at the individual and communal levels. Paul contends that peace of soul is a gift from God, that God’s peace surpasses human understanding and that “the God of peace” will be with us. But God’s gift of peace needs to be cultivated through prayer, virtuous living and fidelity to the Gospel.

(By Daniel J. Harrington, S.J. published in America magazine, September 2008) Note: Fr. Harrington was a Jesuit Biblical Studies scholar who passed away in 2014.

***Thoughts on the Second reading***

**Safely in God’s Hands:** In Scripture, the opposite of faith is not doubt, but anxiety. To lack faith is not so much to have theoretical doubts about God’s existence as it is to be anxious and fearful at a deep level. How is this possible? We cannot help but be full of anxiety and worry about many things – our loved ones, our health, our work, our failure. “Will I pass the exam?” “Will my son come home this evening?” Will my medical check-up be okay?” “Will this person reject me?” “Can I pay my mortgage?” “Do people like me?” “Are my clothes right?” There is rarely a moment in our lives that is not clouded by a worry of some kind.

Is worrying about so many things bad for our faith? Not necessarily. What opposes faith is not so much worry about this or that particular thing, as worry that God has forgotten us, worry that our names are not written in heaven, that we aren’t in good hands, that our lives aren’t safe, and that there is every reason to fear and be anxious because, at the core of things, there isn’t a benevolent, all-powerful goodness who is concerned about us.

Have you ever had the experience of going to your closet and noticing an item of clothing that you had forgotten you still possessed? You see a shirt or a blouse that you haven’t worn in a long time and you say to yourself: “I still have this! I had completely forgotten about it!” It had simply slipped off your radar screen. Such a scenario is what haunts faith, the fear that we have slipped off God’s radar screen, that we have been forgotten, that God will look down on earth sometime and realize with a start that we are still here: “My God, she’s still there. I had completely forgotten about her!” It is this kind of anxiety, the deep fear that we have been forgotten, that pushes many of us to make an assertion of our lives. Nobody wants to live and die unnoticed, insignificant, forgotten. This anxiety is the opposite of faith. It is not so much the fear that God doesn’t exist, as the fear that God does not notice our existence.

What is faith? Faith doesn’t mean that you will have no worries, or that you will not make mistakes, or that you and your loved ones won’t sometimes fall victim to accident or sickness. What faith gives you is the assurance that God is good, that God can be trusted, that God won’t forget you, and that, despite any indication to the contrary, God is still solidly in charge of this universe. Faith says that God is real and God is Lord and, because of this, there is ultimately nothing to fear. We are in safe hands. Reality is gracious, forgiving, loving, redeeming, and absolutely trustworthy. Our task is to surrender to that.

 Fr. Ronald Rolheiser, *Prayer, Our Deepest Longing* (Franciscan Media)

**Related scripture for second reading** (we can be assured knowing that God has more in store for us than we can dream or imagine – God’s ways are “so high above the heavens”):

[**Is 55:6-9**](https://bible.usccb.org/bible/isaiah/55?6)

Seek the LORD while he may be found,
call him while he is near.
Let the scoundrel forsake his way,
and the wicked his thoughts;
let him turn to the LORD for mercy;
to our God, who is generous in forgiving.
For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD.
As high as the heavens are above the earth,
so high are my ways above your ways
and my thoughts above your thoughts.

Discussion Questions

Talk a little about the second reading. How do these words make you feel? What kind of “good” should I be thinking about and holding on to?

Do I need to have complete understanding of God’s ways and teachings?

In what ways might I be confining God to my own limited view? How can I open myself more to the vastness of God?

Talk a little about the vineyard as an image of hope (from Fr. Harrington’s reflection). How might this connect to St. Paul’s words?

Have I ever failed to recognize a prophet, or something holy or sacred in those around me?

What may have prevented me from having the right kind of vision and love?

**Closing Prayer**

Heavenly Father, help our church walk in a manner worthy of the calling you have given us.
Help us in our dealings with one another to be meek and humble of heart.
Grant us the patience to bear one another’s burdens with love.
Inspire our Shepherds with courage to lead wisely and fruitfully for the good of all. Amen. (From Fr. Hugh Duffy)

***Repeating our weekly focus prayer (adapted from St. Anselm):***

Oh Lord, teach us to love those who hate us, and pray for those who do us wrong. May we be the children of your love. Amen.

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***Thoughts for the Coming Week:***

Do I recognize the face of Jesus in those who approach me, or need my help?

Do I act as a faithful servant, producing good fruit for the vineyard?

*“You will know them by their fruits.” Matthew 7:16*

Do I realize the care and protection that God gives each of us in God’s sacred vineyard?