

St Pius-St Anthony 27th Sunday Ordinary Time Year A

Jesus is still on a run(vine) this week again with his specific illustration-examples of vineyards. In addition to the vineyard (as a specific example of fruit or produce), another common detail running through these three parables is the element of work. I guess, vineyards are about a lot of work. Cultivating the ground, pruning the vines, checking for disease-fungi-pests, then harvesting. And starting all over again with the pruning for next year. (*I don't hear about it in these parables, but I knew a fellow in the city who raised grapes and he had to put/keep mesh netting kept all around his vines to be able to salvage any kind grape harvest, instead of birds/squirrels getting it all*). My point here is that while I am no grape harvester worker, I do imagine that grape work and running a vineyard can be labor intensive. I am reminded of my dad who grew up raising tobacco. He always said that everything related to tobacco was hard work, starting in the tobacco beds, bending over & pulling plants, setting the plants, walking the rows spraying the worms or suckering the plants, staking sticks then cutting the stalks, hauling them to the trailer then to the barn-hanging them for curing. And it is not over because you still strip and bale it over winter, and handle it once more taking it all to market. I suggest that grape growing may be similar, because all three of these Jesus parables Jesus involve work. 1) The first week about the grumbling workers over pay/hour inequality. 2) The second parable had the two sons each in his own way rejecting to do the work 3) Then today we have the worst example of tenant workers, as they conduct a mutiny and chase off the owner's messengers, even killing to try to seize/steal the whole vineyard. What is going on with that? I am almost speechless (good you say?) over the cruel greedy and senseless murders by the tenants. We didn't expect that? Maybe a little stealing or grifting but not outright calculated murder! But please keep this in mind, a detail that slipped in on us, is that, this is Matthew Chapter 21. And just before Jesus began teaching this string of parables, He had triumphantly entered into Jerusalem (Sadly we can call it the beginning of the end for him). We reenact this in Holy Week Palm Sunday when Jesus enters into Jerusalem and all people recite a psalm, calling Him 'Son of David, Hosanna in the highest'. But that mood changes quick. The people turn, they 'refuse to accept Jesus, defiantly reject and even murder Him'. Sounds this like parable. Jesus is giving them a chance to see themselves in the tragedy and avoid it! But we know where it leads-crucifixion. That ties in to Jesus saying, "The rejected stone becomes the cornerstone" which also happens to be a quote of Psalm 118:23-24, and from that same Psalm came the line everyone sang praising Him when he entered Jerusalem, vs 26 "Blessed is he who comes in name of Lord". Jesus was cautioning them not to reject Him. They need Him, and while they may not realize it, they have everything in Him.

Which leads us to realize how important that image of a smooth-running, well-established, exceedingly-fruitful vineyard is for the Hebrew people. Isaiah in our first reading described the paradise vineyard of God, like a 'sales brochure' of how perfect the vineyard of the Lord is. We just have to accept it, enter into it and work it. But as our warning parable reveals, 'We humans tend to reject what is good and designed from God for our benefit.' Crazy, I know, but it happens all the time that we bite the hand feeding us. When I hear this parable I can't help but think how good those workers have it. They just don't realize it. Let's look closely at the parable. Jesus sets it up wonderfully: the tenant workers are being given prime land, not just the most fertile land, but all the prep work is already done for them. The watchtower, the water supply irrigation-hillside, rocks cleared and stacked as fence against predators, & wine press built. They just have to watch it, keep water flowing and cut the harvest and press it when it's time. I'm sure we've been given jobs nothing like this before, right? Maybe jobs where you have to grind out every tool or material needed to get it done. I hope we can all see how easy these particular workers have it. I'm sure there are other vineyard owners out there who bring in tenants (like slum landlords), saying "Here's some land, and oh, here are some plant vines for you to get in ground and you'll need to carry water from the lake over there, and be careful of the rattlesnakes, and I'll be back in September for my \$3,000 cut. Now that is work, growing grapes out of nothing. Some workers in life are given such a raw deal. I think of the example from Exodus chapter 5, when Pharaoh tightened the vise on the Israelite servants by demanding that they make the same amount of bricks, but he cut their supply of straw-making them go out & cut their own straw, still demanding same output.

But not these workers, they have it so easy. Like paradise! What happens? They greedily reject it! I hear Jesus tell this parable basically to challenge us to be more content with what we have, instead of always looking over the fences and desiring more and more. He is challenging us to 'settle down and not be the source of our own unhappiness by never being content with what he has given us. Again, in this parable, Jesus points out how blessed and taken care of these workers are. The warning is that they reject it. Jesus doesn't want us to reject or lose His grace. It reminds me of the story of the farmer who felt his life was tied up in a knot, and he was so stressed out. So, he went to visit his priest. He said, "Fr, you just can't imagine my house is so stressful, I'm anxious all the time, there is so much going on between my kids, my wife and myself. I need help." So the priest said, "I think some chickens will help-Go, get three of them and bring them into your home to provide you some homegrown eggs for breakfast." A week passed and the farmer came back saying, "Fr I'm not sure that helped any, we are all still at each other's necks all the time." So, the priest said, "You need to bring a milk goat into your home, he'll provide your diet different minerals. It will do your house some good." So the farmer did and again he came back the next week, saying to Father, "Padre, you may not know what is going on, it is getting so much

worse, with those chickens and the now the goat. Goats don't do things where they are supposed to and everyone is up in arms about the smell and mess and everything chewed up." So the priest said, "Okay you may be right, go ahead and move the animals out to the barn or sell them to your neighbor. Have a family dinner tonight, and call me tomorrow." The next day, the farmer called and the priest asked, "How is the family?" The farmer said, "Father you can't imagine how much better everything is, we have so much peace now and we all listen to each other better and worked together getting things back in order." Great, right? Again, sometimes maybe we don't know what we have, and Jesus' parable reminds us to not reject the blessing in front of us. It is God offering us His grace.