

[Readings: Isaiah 5:1-7; Psalm 80; Philippians 4:6-9; Matt 21:33-43]

Did you pay attention to the very first verse of today's First Reading? "Let me now sing of my friend, my friend's song concerning his vineyard?" You and I are not that familiar with the images used by Isaiah and Jesus. Do YOU accept or do YOU decline? That's the musical message of today's readings. Do YOU accept the invitation to be a good steward and disciple of the Lord?

Both Isaiah and Jesus tell the same parable. Rather than repeat the stories, let me translate them for you. In the 8th Century B. C., Isaiah chastises his listeners (in song!) because they had the opportunity, in light of a pending invasion, to align themselves with the covenant of God instead of a contract with political neighbors. They chose their neighbors. They were invaded anyway!

Victory and prosperity would have been theirs, but they chose defeat and domination. God had prepared a special nation for Himself, and that nation chose a culture of death to embrace and to infuse into their daily lives.

Fast forward to the year 30 A. D. The Jewish leaders still have not learned their lesson. Money, status, power, politics, these were the false "gods" that people were chasing. And some among us still do that to this day.

God is looking for justice (*mishpat*, in Hebrew) but found only bloodshed (*mispah*). God is looking for righteousness (*sedakah*) but was disappointed with outcry (*se'agah*). God had planted choice grapes (*soreq*) but was given sour and stinking, rotten grapes (*sorek*). Isaiah's song ends in heartache; Jesus' parable ends in disappointment. If you decline my invitation, he says, I'll offer it to someone else!

Look back on the hopes you had in the past. Think of the hopes you have for the future. A wedding and a marriage. Starting life all over again. Putting hurts behind you. Losing a job or taking another one. Moving to a new city, starting from scratch. It could be any time the world seemed new and fresh, and life would yield great results.

But for all the work – the clearing, the digging, trying to start fresh – there was no harvest. We don't have to be farmers to know the experience of withered

hope. That is the fate of the culture of death.

Last week there was a terrible incident in Las Vegas. 50 people were killed and more than 500 were injured. Another act of violence in our world with no rhyme or reason. We have a serious problem in our country with the ever-increasing level of violence and hatred and there seems to be no solution.

We have allowed anger to become a staple of our society in the way we speak to people we disagree with, and we have fostered a rationale to strike out at political opponents with pure contempt. After this latest attack, what will be our national response? There will be expert after expert talking about what they believe causes such things to happen and of course there will be the call for prayer from the very people who spend their time trying to demean the notion of God and call all who believe in God as unenlightened and bigoted people.

In the face of such events, we fail to see how hatred is feeding the minds and hearts of so many in our country and we are not addressing the roots of hatred. We have calls to be "kind" and to stop being "mean", but we fail to root out the vices in our society that feed sin; we are not even able to talk about sin. The evil in our world comes from our refusal to see the clear difference between what is good and what is evil.

There is a difference in believing in God and not believing in God. There is a difference in building a home on prayer and the Christian values of love, forgiveness and compassion from the home that is built solely on secular wants and desires. For a person with faith in God, you are never alone; no problem is too great to overcome and there is a support system of people called the Church. When people cut God and the Church out of their lives, they leave off an important part of creating a good life. People often fail to recognize the importance of a church community and a close relationship with God under the guise of not needing to go to Mass or belong to a denomination.

This is not to say that people who go to church have no problems or that they do not sin; far from it. But people who pray and go to church, who have a growing faith, are able to find a new perspective to life and find new ways to resolve difficulties. Is there any doubt why the Bible talks so much about

forgiveness and conversion? Is it any wonder why the Bible teaches us about compassion and mercy?

Jesus proclaims a message of a world built on peace and justice; where we treat those with the greatest needs with the greatest of love. Simply stated, the world we live in is not the world which Jesus came to teach us as God's plan. God does not want us to live in fear and with hatred in our hearts. God does not want us to live in the midst of sin and vice.

Our Second Reading says it all, and I wish this was the motto or mission statement of every parishioner and every household: "Have no anxiety at all. Make your requests known to God. Then the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

"Whatever is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, and gracious, 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."

So, we pray for conversion in the hearts of all those who have rejected God and for our community, to regain a balance in life by putting God first. We pray for the repose of the souls of all who die by violence, for strength in their families and for peace in our country.

Our hope in Christ is the foundation of our outreach as responsible parish disciples and stewards. On Him we build our own lives and the lives of those in need – the weak and the marginalized, the poor, the homeless and the innocent, the unborn, the frail and the elderly, stone upon stone. With Jesus as the capstone rejected by the builders. Will you accept or will you decline the challenge not only to believe, but to speak out and to act? The choice to accept discipleship and stewardship in your life is up to you. AMEN!