

[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?" Why sing a song that is depressing and ends in tragedy? I had a flashback to an episode of "Cheers" where Rebecca rents an Irish band for a St. Patrick's Day party at the bar. Every time she requested a peppy jig, they played an Irish dirge about death! 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 8<sup>th</sup> 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. The readings this week deal with rejecting God and repenting of that rejection. At what moments have you turned away from God? What has been or should be the way you turn back?

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. 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.

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 to each other" 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.

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 parish 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.”

Here are three stories that show what a crazy world this is...

A person from Grand Forks, North Dakota robbed the First Community Bank in Fargo. After he left with the money, police were called and upon reviewing the ransom note, they realized it had been written on the robber's bank deposit slip, complete with his name and address.

A person walked into a liquor store with a shotgun and demanded all of the money from the cash register. After the cashier put the money in the bag, the

man asked for a bottle of Scotch from behind the counter. The cashier refused because he did not believe the young man was 21. The robber swore he was and handed over his ID to prove it. As soon as the robber left, the cashier was able to give police the robber's name and address.

And from today's Gospel: A group of tenants killed their landlord's son believing that the dead man's land and inheritance would go to them. REALLY?

The moral of all these stories: Crime doesn't pay. Our divine inheritance will not come by hook or by crook, but by good and faithful service to God.

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. 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? Today is Respect Life Sunday. This month is Respect Life Month. Will you let YOUR voice be heard? The choice to accept discipleship and stewardship in your life is up to you. AMEN!