

27<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, 8 October 2023

Scriptures: Isaiah 5:1-7; Philippians 4:6-9; Matthew 21:33-43

Homily: Fr. Ken

In the Gospel, Jesus is telling a parable to the chief priests and elders of his time. But it is not just a story. It is, in fact, the very foretelling of the deceitful and murderous intentions of his very listeners, who before long will turn to violence in order to rid themselves of Jesus.

The story Jesus tells describes workers in a vineyard, who, although they are tenant workers, they behaved as if they owned the place. When the owner, now abroad, sends servants to collect the produce, these workers were not impressed. It is their land now, they feel. The owner is away. They work; they make the rules. They claim what they feel is theirs, by violent action.

The parable becomes real, of course, when Jesus himself is arrested, put on trial, and sent to his death.

Perhaps the religious elders, listening to the story, did not believe that they would ever do such a thing, and therefore did not recognize themselves in the story.

But the story came true, and they did commit a crime of violence. For when people feel threatened by someone else, they quickly resort to arms to defend what they feel is theirs, rightly or wrongly. Any sense of fear breeds repression, and people will justify their actions simply out of fear.

In an age of anger, a time when fear and favor jostle for advantage, the message of Jesus is that we persevere in goodness and never let go of it.

In the face of the forces gathering against him, Jesus reminds us of the old saying: "It was the stone rejected by the builders that became the keystone".

Violence will never win the day. Wrongdoing contains within itself the seed of its own destruction, and Jesus who was crucified, rose from the dead so that we might live.

St. Paul, writing to the Philippians, promotes this way of goodness today. "Fill your minds with everything that is true", he tells us, "everything that can be thought of as virtuous". He continues: "Keep doing all the things that you learned from me", he says.

It is in this way that the God of peace will always be with us. This is no easy commitment and we will need stout hearts to do as Paul urges us.

Sadly, now in our own time, the temptation for people to act like the workers in the Gospel vineyard, is ever present: the resort to power politics to sort out the world.

In the early 1960's, the United States Ambassador to the United Nations was the very intelligent politician and gifted speaker, Adlai Stevenson. He stated: "The early years of the United Nations have been difficult ones. But what did we expect? That peace would drift down from the skies like soft snow? That there would be no ordeal, no anguish, no testing, in this greatest of all human undertakings? Let prayer be our habit, so that peace may be our reward".

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