

27th Sunday, Oct 4, 2020 (Bellarmino)

The central image in today's readings is the vineyard. Isaiah speaks of God planting a vineyard, only to have it produce uneatable grapes. It will be destroyed. Isaiah then becomes very direct—naming his people as the vineyard.

The gospel gives us a third edition parable. An earlier source has drastically adapted a parable of Jesus to speak of the prophets and Jesus himself. Then Matthew revised the revision. Because of the tension between the synagogue and his community, Matthew transforms the parable of the tenant farmers who seize the servants and son of the vineyard's owner into an allegory about those who rejected Jesus. We must be careful not to read the passage as an anti-Semitic charge, for the very community considering the text was made up of Jewish Christians. In the final line of today's passage, Matthew challenges his community—and now us—to enter the vineyard of loving and faithful service.

Sandwiched between these two sober and challenging readings are words of comfort and hope from St. Paul. He encourages the Philippians to have no anxiety. The readings, then, present us with the fruitful tension of responsibility and trust.

Let's listen to God's word!

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Appreciating the complex history of our gospel text can help us appreciate Jesus' hope for his hearers: that they would seize the opportunity to recognize and accept the reign of God in their midst.

So too for us today, as we add the themes of respect life and Francis of Assisi. Respect life has often meant a very narrow focus—as we have heard recently concerning the Supreme Court and the presidential election. Francis of Assisi is well known for his love of God's creatures. A more recent Francis—the Pope—has emphasized an even wider vision: the very life of our planet. (By the way, Pope Francis was scheduled to travel to Assisi to make public today his new encyclical; it will undoubtedly continue his wider focus of caring for our common home.)

Along with the insights of both St. Francis and Pope Francis, we would also do well in this season to retrieve Cardinal Bernardin's Consistent Ethic of Life, both its content and its spirit. His vision would help us value all life, calling us beyond all forms of violence to compassion and peacemaking, beyond abuse and domination of the earth's resources to stewardship and care for creation, beyond a vindictive God to a gracious God and a faithful Jesus.

When we are honest with ourselves, we acknowledge how challenging it is to embrace fully the consistent ethic of life and its roots, the life and teaching of Jesus. In different parts of our lives, we and so many others seem to base our judgments on economic and political worldviews rather than on the Gospel. Values cluster around conservative or liberal, but not around Jesus' call. Unexamined prejudices color our decisions and shape our actions.

Today, this month, this lifetime, how will you seize the opportunity to choose life?