

# Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year A

## 27<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time

### **First reading:**

(Isaiah 5 .1-7)

*The Vineyard of the Lord*

A vineyard needs a lot of devoted care, pruning, manuring, tying back. In the rocky soil of Israel, even more special care is needed, such as gathering the stones to form retaining walls to keep the soil from eroding, building a lookout tower against thieves and a vine press for crushing the grapes.

Then the right fruiting vine has to be grafted onto the sturdy stock, as here the vine dresser grafts on fine grapes. Imagine his disappointment when all he gets for his pains is inedible wild grapes!

After this haunting parable of Isaiah, the vineyard became a stock image of Israel, swathed in God's loving care, and all the dwellers in the rich vines of the hill country of Israel would be aware that it was an image of the love lavished on the vineyard. So, when Israel goes into Exile, Psalm 80 laments: 'You brought a vine out of Egypt. Why have you broken down its fences? Every passer-by plucks its grapes. Wild beasts feed on it.' The prophets also, especially Ezekiel, use the image. Jesus' hearers would immediately recognize what he meant.

### **Question:**

*Can one transfer the image of the vineyard unchanged to the Church?*

### **Second reading:**

(Philippians 4.6-9)

*A Greeting*

This warm and affectionate little passage was probably originally the end of a letter from Paul to the community at Philippi which he loved so well. It is a lovely conclusion to a letter.

Paul encourages them in every way to be cheerful in the Lord, but especially to be grateful. If we really appreciate that the Lord is near, we cannot worry and the peace of God will rest upon us. Then also gratitude and thanksgiving will be our mode of thought, penetrating all our thoughts on every subject.

The word Paul uses for 'thanksgiving' is the word used for the Eucharist, which is the great prayer of thanksgiving, offered by Christ to the Father in the name of us all. It is the summing up of all prayer, petition, gratitude and admiration. No doubt Paul is thinking of it as the high point of all prayer

### **Question:**

*Is Paul encouraging us to live in a fools' paradise, or can we really be without fear or worry?*

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## **Gospel:**

*(Matthew 21.33-43)*

### *Tenants of the Vineyard*

Jesus' understanding of the sovereignty of God brought him the violent opposition of some of the Jewish leaders. Were they corrupt, or just closed to any new way of thinking, so closed that they could not see that Jesus was the promised Messiah?

Anyway, Jesus used this story about the tenants of a vineyard to show that they were not leading the people as they should. Everyone would immediately understand the image of the vineyard. The prophet Isaiah - and many others after him - had used this image in a well-known poem eight centuries earlier to show that the vineyard of Israel refused to yield a good harvest to God, whatever care God lavished on it.

God expected fairness of judgment and all he found was a shriek of agony (the same word in Hebrew apart from one letter).

What does this mean for us? Not that we have to follow every new idea. But it does mean that we must be open to the idea that we may be wrong, that our service of the Lord may be faulty, that people we find tiresome or unacceptable may have more good in them than we credited. God's ways are not our ways, and we need to watch out for the bend in the road.

## **Question:**

Are the tenants of God's Christian vineyard any better than the previous tenants? Who are they, anyway?

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