

October 8, 2023
Cycle A – 27th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Isaiah 5:1-7

Psalm 80:12, 13-14, 15-16, 19-20

Philippians 4:6-9

Matthew 21:33-43

Notes from Bishop Peter

1. Jesus is a prophet, meaning he challenges us to examine our lifestyles and where necessary to change and produce fruits worthy of his followers. We don't do this alone. The Holy Spirit in us continually moves and inspires us and when the time is right, we see the light, change our ways and let the Kingdom of God break into our lives and surroundings.
2. This is the thrust of today's Gospel. It's the parable about the owner of a vineyard who leases it out. When he sends people to collect what is owed, they beat and kill members of both groups. Finally he sends his son, thinking that they will respect him. However, they throw him out of the vineyard and kill him. Now, he asks, what will the owner do? They respond that he will punish them and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him what is owed at the proper time.
 - a. Jesus is speaking to the chief priests and the elders of the people. The two groups sent by the owner represent Old Testament prophets and the son represents Jesus whom they will expel from the city and be killed by the Romans.
3. Saint Matthew uses Jesus' teaching to warn his own community, perhaps in Antioch, that they must produce fruit worthy of true disciples and not take for granted they will be saved simply because they have become Christians.
4. As an aside, it is important to note that Matthew was an active member of a church community as you are of your parishes. Most of you who read this want to please God by imitating his son, Jesus Christ. Thus you are eager to deepen your relationship with Jesus, not as a loner but as members of a family and a parish.

5. Speaking of conversion, I think of the witness of Ed and Donna Dubaldo who, with a group of musicians, organized Bible and prayer sessions for more than 40 years every Sunday in the Weston Street Correctional Center in Hartford.
 - a. They led the way by becoming more Christ centered so Jesus could work effectively through their persons and ministry.
 - They tell of many conversions among the men and here is one example. Ed met a man on the street who told him how grateful he was to Ed and Donna for their faith-filled religious sessions. He is now a recovering drug addict after spending 8 years in jail. He took the Bible course the Dubaldos offered and to this day has the same Bible he was awarded at the end of the course. The man said, "You tell those men at Hartford Correctional that if God could heal a drug addict like me and get me back with my wife and kids, God can heal any one of them."
6. You might read the short lesson from Philippians where Paul gives his readers some tips on how to produce good fruit for the Lord.
 - a. Firstly, to be honorable means to move throughout the world, believing it is God's temple because, as St. Paul said in the Acts of the Apostles: "In God we live and move and exist." (chapter 17). It is to have faith that God is everywhere and that we are always in God, a God who loves you and wants what is best for you.
 - b. Secondly, we need childlike trust in God so that we feel free to bring anything to God in prayer, our needs, our sorrows and our joys. It's like children who show their parents things they find like seashells or beautiful leaves. God rejoices when we have this childlike confidence.
 - c. Next, it is important to have hope rather than lapsing into despair. Let's listen to the psalmist: "Why are you cast down, O my soul and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise him who is my help and my God." (Psalm 42: 5)
7. Finally, we must exercise patience. This includes seeing situations in daily life, and doing what we can to change them so they reflect the will of God who glories in human beings more fully alive.

8. Eucharist: It is Jesus really and truly present (not a symbol!) who continually challenges us to become better disciples through deeper faith in him, trust in his love, and actions that will lead to the conversion of those who are seeking Jesus, perhaps without even being aware of it.

Amen.