

Twenty-seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time A - We are called by Him to be His steward, He trusts us and will sustain us . Our response is up to us.

October 4, 2020.

We just had the Harvest Moon on Thursday. As in Ecclesiastes Chapter 3 says, **it is a time to harvest.** On that day, 3 transitional deacons, including Deacon Marvin from our parish were ordained to the priesthood by our Diocesan Bishop Paul. After years of studying, hard working, practice, finally when **“The harvest is abundant but the labourers are few”** in the Diocese, we are blessed to have the three new priests. For the Chinese, it is also the Mid-Autumn Festival (中秋節). The festival uses the full moon to signify the reunion of families, yearning for hometown, the love of loved ones, and longing for a good harvest and happiness. Moon cakes are offered as sacrifices on the Festival in the ancient days and have now become Mid-Autumn Festival food and gifts. **It is a time to laugh, a time to dance, a time to embrace, a time to love.** But

In this Sunday's first reading **Isaiah's Song of the Vineyard**, Isaiah (5:1-17) describes the abuse of the Israelites by their leaders as being like vines ripe for cultivation and left unattended. Vineyards evoke careful cultivation by skilled vintners with the expectation of fine vintages of wine. The Lord had prepared Israel like a fine vineyard, and Israel's leaders like vintners with everything at their disposal to be fruitful and successful. What the Lord received instead were wild grapes. Grapes with no cultivation, left to grow or die by chance. They were worth for nothing. **The leaders of Israel were expected to cultivate justice and peace in their subjects, and they didn't.**

In the second reading (Philippines 4:6-9) **St. Paul teaches that the peace of God and the shelter of our hearts and minds in Christ depend on our attitude and the things we value as important.** Envy and greed can lead to inaction and so does anxiety. St. Paul counsels us in moments of anxiety to ask God for what we need, but in a spirit of gratitude for what the Lord has already done. That's the best remedy to a warped sense of entitlement when things don't go as we'd like. Our Lord has promised us that the Heavenly Father knows what we need before we even ask (see Matthew 6:8), so there is no need to worry. **If we occupy ourselves with truth, honour, justice, purity, loveliness, graciousness, and excellence, we'll not only experience the peace of God but also help to spread it.** As St Padre Pio said, **“Do not worry over things that generate preoccupation, derangement and anxiety. One thing only is necessary: to lift up your spirit and love God.”**

The gospel stories in the last three weeks have been about vineyards. Two weeks ago we had the labourers in the marketplace. (Matthew 20:1-16a) The good employer called people to work in his vineyard throughout the day. Last week (Matthew 21:28-32), we had the two sons who were called to work in their father's vineyard, one said, “No,” but went. The other said, “Sure,” but did not go. This week we have another vineyard story (Matthew 21:33-43) the story of the evil tenant farmers who tried to steal the vineyard from their Master, even putting his messengers to death and finally putting his son to death.

The vineyard in this Sunday's Gospel was constructed perfectly by the owner to produce fruit. However the labourers decide to steal the vineyard from the Master and keep the fruit for themselves. Our Lord invites us to imagine a group of men given the opportunity of a lifetime: not only a good place to live but a great way to make a living. Imagine a business at an excellent location, with an abundant clientele, a great lease, and the job of making a lot of

people happy (*the vineyard, God's kingdom, is for producing wine which, throughout Scripture, symbolizes joy*). If that weren't enough, the men running the business also have a beautiful place to live and a great landlord. The owner has been very kind to his tenants, even going beyond what a tenant would expect or deserve. All the owner asks in return is a share of the joy that he hoped the tenants would produce. However, the tenants start beating up the people coming to collect the owner's fair share and leaving him empty handed. There's no remorse: gradually they start killing them too. The owner shows a kindness that the tenants do not deserve. He keeps giving them opportunities until one day he gives them the greatest and most definitive opportunity: he sends the heir himself, a reminder that he is the owner and they are the tenants, and an extension of his very self. In their twisted logic, they convince themselves that by eliminating the heir, any trace of ownership will die with the owner, and he'll also stop bothering them.

The chief priests, scribes, and elders pronounce judgment on this "theoretical" case, and their own words condemn what they are doing. They were called upon to provide fruit for the Lord. They were given the mission to nourish the people in the Word of God and prepare them for the Word Become Flesh. However, they used the people for their own selfish gain. They would tax the people extremely high for their own financial support. The people were also their means of power before the Romans. They did not prepare the people for the Messiah. In fact, they did not even want a Messiah. **The parable of the wicked tenants in the Gospel is a way of teaching the Pharisees that they had fallen into a warped sense of entitlement over something that didn't belong to them: the People of God.**

We can see ourselves in this parable as well. Each of us is a tenant cultivating a small portion of God's vineyard and when harvest time arrives we are expected to produce the fruits of right living, by displaying an attitude of caring, sharing and showing forth the charity of the gospel in our daily lives. By doing this we are practising what we profess to believe at our Sunday celebration of the mass. This parable challenges us to keep working in God's service and not become complacent. Examine our conscience to see if we're producing the gifts of God's love or are we idling, failing to appreciate the beauty of our lives, the joy of our families and God's loving care. A time will come when we have to be answerable for the way in which we have carried out the task God has given to us. What if at the end of life we have nothing to offer but sour grapes of a pagan lifestyle? We will have smothered a beautiful being with indifference, ingratitude, selfishness and neglect and have become useless to God. Christ came so we can bear fruit and become an immense and beautiful harvest. This is no easy task but it is a necessary step towards redemption. Take stock of our priorities. Look at how we spend our time, talents and treasures. Stop now and look around us wherever we are. We are in the vineyard, and God has chosen us to care for it. Our vineyard may not have a single grapevine and it may have suffered through some difficult tenancies. It is still God's good creation. **It is time for us to make a decision. We are called by Him to be His steward, He trusts us and will sustain us . Our response is up to us.**