

HOMILY SUNDAY 27-A

“The Vineyard Given To Others”

(Isaiah 5:1-7; Psalm 80; Philippians 4:6-9; Matthew 21:33-43)

Johnny's mother looked out the window and noticed him “playing church” with their three kittens. He had the kittens sitting in a row and was preaching to them. She smiled and went about her work. A while later she heard loud meowing and hissing. She ran back to the open window to see Johnny baptizing the kittens in a tub of water. “Johnny!” she called out. “Stop that! Those kittens don't like water!” Johnny looked up at her and said, “They should have thought about that before they joined my church.”

How are you responding to God's call to build up his kingdom here on earth?

Cherish the greatest gift of all - the Kingdom of God. Live in it and never lose it.

Fr. Bill and I have a garden in The Pas which we began from scratch, measuring it out, removing the sod, tilling the soil, and finally planting it and caring for it. I love strawberries and made sure that one whole plot was reserved for strawberries. The plot is 30 feet long and 4 feet wide and covered with strawberry plants. However for some reason the plants on one half of that plot have yielded nothing for the second year in a row.

I can identify with the both the prophet Isaiah and the gospel of Matthew in today's readings. Both speak of a landowner who lavished attention on a vineyard, only to be disappointed with the lack of results in the first case, and the attitude and actions of the workers in the vineyard in the case of the gospel.

God had chosen Israel out of nothing, and had lavished on it everything it needed to become a model nation, a people of God, a holy nation. They were called to be the Chosen people; the one's who would model what it means to live in the Kingdom of God. They had experienced miracles; had been given the Law, a land, kings that they wanted and prophets to admonish them, to no avail. The disordered lust of the leaders for power and control, for selfish gain and profit, had turned what was to be a model life with God into a narrow, rigid, judgmental religiosity tied in with an unjust political and economic system.

The recent Olympics in China offer us a glimpse into this reality. Behind and beneath all the splendour and opulence and beauty of the opening and closing ceremonies, behind the well run games and the shattered world records and numerous gold medals for the country's athletes, their lurked a pernicious systemic oppressive political regime that brutally and heartlessly suppressed any attempt at protest. We can only guess to what extent that happened. I do know that Zenith, an Catholic internet news service, reported that after the games, another Catholic bishop in China was detained and a priest was quoted as saying that everything is going back to the way it was before the games. What happened in China is a modern example of what happened to the Kingdom of God in the hands of the Jewish leaders at the time of Jesus.

God sent his Son into the world to break this cycle of addiction to power and control. That is what

the gospel account today is all about. Jesus' death and resurrection is the apocalyptic turning point which ushers in a new age of the church. After his death-resurrection, God will take the kingdom from Israel and give it to a people who will produce its fruit. Thus the vineyard no longer symbolizes Israel, but the kingdom of God already present and given to Israel in the OT, but now transferred to the new people (Jews and gentiles), the church. The parable is now a parable of salvation history, a judgment on the whole of Israel. The Kingdom of God is a process reality, present in the OT, transferred to the Church, and will come in full glory at the end of the age.

This is not just about Israel and the Jewish leaders of that time. Nor is it just about a political system like that in China. You and I are the new people of God, baptized into Jesus Christ. We are the ones who as the church, the Body of Christ, are to be collaborating with His Spirit to build up the reign of God here on earth.

We can ask ourselves. "How are we living out the reality of the Kingdom of God in our lives, our families, our workplaces and our society? What kind of parable would Jesus tell us today? Are our homes little churches, each in their own way building up the kingdom of God? Is there love, affection, forgiveness, honesty, unity, trust, sharing of feelings, open communication, prayer and loving service in our homes and families? Or are we also losing our bearings like the Jewish leaders and giving into false gods of selfishness, addiction, violence and abuse, pleasure seeking, gossip, jealousy and envy and above all, power and control? Are we living up to our calling to be Church, the Body of Christ, the new People of God?

There is even a broader dimension to this gospel story. Today more than ever we are aware of the delicate and fragile state of the environment, the ecology of our planet. That too is God's vineyard. We have been entrusted with the whole of creation, to care for it, to live in a harmonious relationship with it. We can ask ourselves, "How have we as human beings living on this planet, cared for all of God's creation?" That too, is part of being faithful to God's call to be God's own people, living in the world that God created as gift to us all. How unfortunate that we need an ecological crisis before we take seriously God's commandment to exercise good stewardship over God's creation. We all need to be doing our part, however, small, to contribute to a greener, healthier world. For our part, in The Pas we have begun to diligently compost what we can and recycle the rest. That leaves me with a warm feeling of walking with the Spirit of Jesus in that respect.

St. Paul in the second reading, his letter to the Philippians, describes the reality of truly living in obedience to God's Word and in a harmonious relationship with all of God's creation. We will be responding to God's love through prayer, freedom from worry and anxiety and living in the peace, joy and justice of the Holy Spirit. We are called to live a virtuous life of truth, humility, forgiveness, love.

The Eucharist that we celebrate today is a celebration of the presence of God in people, Word and Sacrament. We are called to be a Eucharistic people in all that we do as we live out the Kingdom of God in our daily lives.

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