

TWENTY-SEVENTH SUNDAY OT - A

As some of you know, when I was pastor at St. Edward's in Lowell my Dad was in charge of maintenance.

There was a small hill behind the Marian grotto and he had planted a garden there as well as some grapevines.

Every year I would ask him, "Dad, do you have any grapes this year?"

And he would reply, "Not yet."

This went on for several years until finally when I asked him, he joyfully responded, "Yes!"

To which I replied, "So where's the wine?"

Today we have yet another parable about the Kingdom of God involving a vineyard.

Echoing the "song of the vineyard" from the Old Testament which we heard in today's first reading, Jesus describes how much the landowner - who represents God - has invested in the vineyard he has entrusted to its human tenants.

But those tenants - who represent the chief priests and elders of the people - decide to use the vineyard to serve themselves rather than the landowner.

They mistreat the servants sent by the landowner - who represent the prophets of old, culminating in John the Baptist.

Finally they kill the landowner's Son - a foreshadowing of how Jesus himself will be treated.

The landowner punishes those wretched tenants and entrusts his vineyard to others - the Gentiles - who will "give him the produce at the proper times."

Again we need to recall that Matthew is addressing his Gospel to a Jewish Christian audience who are having a hard time accepting Gentiles as equals in the community of believers.

Accepting those different from us, not of our clan, who might jarr our complacent *status quo* is always a challenge that we need to hear.

In the the last line of Isaiah's "song of the vineyard" we read that, "God ... looked for justice, but hark, the outcry."

There are so many areas of life that cry out for justice: the right to life for the unborn, the need to address racial tensions in our country, and the extreme poverty that exists throughout the world.

In the midst of all these cries for justice we would do well to recall how St. Paul urges us to "hold on to whatever is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, gracious, and excellent" so that the peace of God might be with us.

This applies to holding on to Christ's teachings as well as to the witness of the saints down through the ages.

Tomorrow/Today is the feast of St. Francis.

3

St. Francis is remembered for many honorable, pure, and gracious things; for instance, most of us are acquainted with his "Prayer for Peace":

"Make me a channel of your peace. Where there is hatred, let me bring your love."

Our Pope, who took St. Francis' name, has repeatedly challenged us to seek peace and to spread Christ's love ...

... by hearing the pleading of the unborn, by recognizing the cry of the poor, and by listening to the voices of those on the margins of society.

In his ground-breaking encyclical "Laudato Si," Pope Francis, building on the teaching of his predecessors, has called upon all men and women of good will to also be attentive to the care of our common home, planet Earth.

The title of the encyclical is taken from the first two words in Italian of St. Francis' lesser known but very profound "Canticle of Creation":

"Be praised, my Lord, for all your creation!"

All of creation belongs first and foremost to God and exists for the glory of God.

You and I were created to be the stewards of creation, not its owners, and certainly not to misuse and abuse it.

We need to respect the urging of science to act in ways that will preserve our fragile biosphere.

God has entrusted his garden, his vineyard to us.

Will we be faithful caretakers of it?