

TWENTY-SEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Isaiah = I-ZAY-uh

A lengthy, rich, and poetic reading whose point is the condemnation of the house of Israel for its wildness.

spaded = SPY-d*d

Even emphasis on "What more was."

Even emphasis on "bring forth wild grapes."

LECTIONARY #139

READING I Isaiah 5:1-7

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah

Let me now **sing** of my **friend**,
my **friend's song concerning his vineyard.**

My **friend had a vineyard**
on a **fertile hillside**;
he **spaded** it, **cleared** it of **stones**,
and **planted** the **choicest vines**;
within it he built a **watchtower**,
and **hewed** out a **wine press**.

Then he **looked** for the **crop of grapes**,
but what it **yielded** was **wild grapes**.

Now, **inhabitants of Jerusalem and people of Judah**,
judge between **me** and my **vineyard**:

What more was there to do for my vineyard
that I **had not done**?

Why, when I **looked** for the **crop of grapes**,
did it **bring forth wild grapes**?

Now, I will let you **know**
what I **mean to do** with my **vineyard**:
take away its **hedge**, **give** it to **grazing**,
break through its **wall**, let it be **trampled!**

READING I

Isaiah's prophecy takes the form of a poetic song in today's first reading, and reads as a parable for those in Israel who hear Isaiah's words. Using the image of a beautiful vineyard that will be made "a ruin," Isaiah addresses Israel's failure to remain faithful to the covenant. In the preceding chapters, Isaiah has revealed to the people that Jerusalem will soon be torn apart by great destruction. Although some inhabitants will survive as a remnant, the nation as a whole has gone astray from the way of God and will be dis-

persed from the land. Thus, the lamentation that follows in the song of the vineyard.

Isaiah states that the song is sung about his "friend" who, in reality, is God. Isaiah labors at length to describe the way in which this friend has invested his energy and his livelihood into his vineyard. First, the vineyard owner chooses the most fertile land on which to plant his grape vines. He spades the land, removes stones, and plants "the choicest vines." He constructs a tower from which he can watch over his vineyard, and he readies for a fruitful harvest by preparing a wine press.

Undoubtedly, this is a project of great pride for Isaiah's "friend."

With all the construction complete, he now waits for the growth of the vines and hopes for an abundant crop of beautiful, sweet grapes. But, alas, all this grand vineyard yields are "wild grapes" that are rotten. Still speaking from the viewpoint of the vineyard owner, Isaiah calls the people of Israel to pass judgement on the predicament presented in the song. What is the owner to do? Has he not done all that he can to assure a good harvest? At this point in the story, what might the hearers of this

Slight pause between "rain" and "upon."

Yes, I will make it a ruin:
 it **shall not** be pruned or hoed,
 but **overgrown** with **thorns** and **briers**;
 I will **command** the **clouds**
not to send **rain upon** it.
 The **vineyard** of the **LORD** of **hosts** is the **house** of **Israel**,
 and the **people** of **Judah** are his **cherished plant**;
 he looked for **judgment**, but **see, bloodshed!**
 for **justice**, but **hark, the outcry!**

For meditation and context:

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 80:9, 12, 13–14, 15–16, 19–20 (Isaiah 5:7a)

R. The vineyard of the Lord is the house of Israel.

A vine from Egypt you transplanted;
 you drove away the nations and planted it.
 It put forth its foliage to the Sea,
 its shoots as far as the River.

Why have you broken down its walls,
 so that every passer-by plucks its fruit,
 the boar from the forest lays it waste,
 and the beasts of the field feed upon it?

Once again, O LORD of hosts,
 look down from heaven, and see;
 take care of this vine,
 and protect what your right hand
 has planted,
 the son of man whom you yourself
 made strong.

Then we will no more withdraw from you;
 give us new life, and we will call upon
 your name.

O LORD, God of hosts, restore us;
 if your face shine upon us, then we shall
 be saved.

be thinking? What is the lesson to be learned?

While the "friend" asked the people to decide the fate of the vineyard for themselves, the speaker then tells the listeners exactly what he intends to do with his failed project. The tone of the story builds with intensity as he begins to describe in detail how he will destroy his vineyard. He will begin by dismantling hedges and walls so that other may trample upon it. He will not care for it in any way, neither pruning the vines nor hoeing the soil, but instead will allow it to be "overgrown with thorns

and briers." He will go so far as to pray that no rain will fall upon it to keep it alive. It will become thoroughly lifeless. It is only here at the end of the song that Isaiah clearly identifies the vineyard as the "house of Israel," and the "cherished plant" is "the people of Judah." The Lord did all that he could to provide for Israel; his sense of justice leaves no other choice than to dismantle what he once favored.

READING II Before Paul closes his letter to the Philippians, he imparts further advice on living the Christian

life. First, he upholds the importance of prayer as a means of conquering all forms of anxiety. He contends that when one turns to God with "prayer and petition, with thanksgiving," making one's needs known to him, that the "peace of God" will fill believers. Prayer is the way believers communicate all things to God and express their complete dependence upon him. The divine peace that flows from prayer is the foundation of their Christian life and keep them in Christ.

This leads Paul to his second piece of advice for the Christians at Philippi. He

Philippians = fih-LIP-ee-uhnz

This reading begins with an exhortation that seems easy to make but hard to believe—is it really possible to have no anxiety at all? Paul wants to encourage you that it might be so.

A really compelling rhythm picks up here.

The conclusion is especially uplifting.

Clear-eyed as many of Jesus' parables are, it must be admitted that some of them are completely opaque. This is one of the more challenging ones to fathom.

Don't be afraid to stress the viciousness of the tenants. It's part of the parable's power.

proceeds to list several virtues that he connects with the gift of God's peace. These virtues are truth, honor, justice, purity, beauty, and graciousness. Some similar values are found in the philosophical movement of stoicism, which was prevalent during that time period and in that community. Their culture was very skilled at celebrating core human values that would ensure happiness in this life. Thus, Paul challenges the Philippians to strive for "excellence" in living out these virtues in their Christian life. Paul tells them that what they have "learned and received and

READING II Philippians 4:6–9

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Philippians

Brothers and sisters:

Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God.

Then the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Finally, brothers and sisters,

whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

Keep on doing what you have learned and received and heard and seen in me.

Then the God of peace will be with you.

GOSPEL Matthew 21:33–43

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew

Jesus said to the chief priests and the elders of the people:

"Hear another parable.

There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a hedge around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a tower. Then he leased it to tenants and went on a journey.

When vintage time drew near,

he sent his servants to the tenants to obtain his produce.

But the tenants seized the servants and one they beat, another they killed, and a third they stoned.

heard and seen" from his teaching and his actions is all that they need to follow the path of discipleship. In the end, Paul assures them that lives lived virtuously in Christ are sure to be filled with the grace of the "God of peace." Once again, there is no room for anxiety in the life of a Christian who has the mind and the heart of Christ.

GOSPEL

Just as in the story of the vineyard in the first reading, from Isaiah, today's Gospel text from Matthew also considers the owner of a vineyard. The landowner plants a vineyard, sur-

rounds it with a hedge, digs a wine press, and constructs a watch tower. However, rather than caring for this vineyard on his own as in Isaiah, the landowner entrusts its care to several tenants. Because he is confident that they will watch over it with the same level of care and concern that he put in to create it, he departs on a journey.

We can assume that an entire growing season has passed when the landowner sends his servants to the vineyard to collect his share of the harvest. However, the tenants, who have been watching over the vineyard, have no intention of sharing with

Again he sent **other servants**, more **numerous** than the **first** ones, but they **treated** them in the **same way**.
Finally, he sent his **son** to them, thinking,
 ‘They will **respect** my **son**.’
 But when the **tenants** saw the **son**, they **said** to one **another**,
 ‘**This** is the **heir**.
Come, let us **kill** him and **acquire** his **inheritance**.’
 They **seized** him, threw him **out** of the **vineyard**, and **killed** him.
What will the **owner** of the **vineyard** **do** to those **tenants** when
 he **comes**?’
 They **answered** him,
 ‘He will **put** those **wretched men** to a **wretched death**
 and **lease** his **vineyard** to **other tenants**
 who will **give** him the **produce** at the **proper times**.’
 Jesus **said** to them, ‘Did you **never read** in the **Scriptures**:
*The **stone** that the **builders** **rejected***
*has **become** the **cornerstone**;*
*by the **Lord** has this been **done**,*
*and it is **wonderful** in our **eyes**?’
Therefore, I say to you,
 the **kingdom** of **God** will be **taken away** from you
 and **given** to a **people** that will **produce** its **fruit**.”*

Likewise, the brutality of the tenants.

The parable pivots when Jesus quotes Scripture, as much to change its tone as to offer understanding.

This is a hard conclusion to a disturbing parable.

the landowner. Instead, they beat and kill the servants that the landowner sends them. As a final means of attempting to secure his portion of the harvest, the landowner sends his son to the tenants, thinking, “They will respect my son.” Seeing the son as the heir to all that belongs to the landowner, they put him to death as well.

When Jesus asks the chief priests and elders, who have been listening to the parable, what will happen to the wicked tenants, they reply that the landowner will put them to death and hand the vineyard over to the care of responsible tenants. Jesus

responds by reminding them of Psalm 118, which the early Church understood as a prophetic allusion to Jesus being rejected by his own people. Although rejected, the “cornerstone” of the Church, namely Christ himself, was deemed “wonderful” in the eyes of those who received him and cared for his Father’s vineyard. Matthew’s Jesus ends the passage by suggesting that God will not look so favorably upon those who reject the gift that has been sent specifically to them, and that gift is his very Son. S.W.