

27th Sunday A (Matt 21:33-43)

“You’re my one and only.” You’re special to me.” Lovers say this to each other. Parents say this to children. We say it to our best friend. And we are delighted to hear it! When a special person enters our life we focus all our attention, energy, hope for future happiness and fulfillment on our one and only. If we are let down, disappointed, rejected by our one and only, we can be crushed and devastated. The core of our being is deeply affected, and we wonder, “What’s wrong with me?” “What did I do to make this happen?” “How could I have prevented it?” And we fear to enter into another relationship.

Our Scripture readings today present God as one who has been let down, disappointed, rejected by his one and only, the Israel of old. The prophet Isaiah in a simple song about country life sums up the history of Israel’s relationship with God. It is one of sin, punishment and estrangement from God. God had handpicked the Israelites from all the peoples of the earth to be his special people, often described as God’s bride, but here as God’s vineyard. God sent prophets and teachers to guide them. God gave them a land of promise, but the people failed miserably as their enemies conquered them and took them into exile.

However, God never gives up. God’s passionate love for all of us prompted God to become one of us in Jesus Christ. In our Gospel parable, the murder of the vineyard owner’s son is not final. In Jesus it is saving and opens to all peoples the privilege of being God’s special people. All people of the earth are now God’s one and only. Jesus lays the responsibility on the tenants of the vineyard, whoever they may be – Jew or Gentile, you or me. We are the inheritors of the vineyard, and we now have the dangerous freedom to let God down or not to let God down. Jesus tells us that he is the vine and we are the branches, and that we are to bear fruit- to live fruitful lives that make a difference in our world, making the presence of God in our world seen and felt so that God will be known as our one and only and be praised and glorified.

Bearing fruit takes many forms. A father and mother understanding and forgiving their child who has disappointed them in doing poor school work or not living up to their expectations. Being there when a recent widow or widower who has slipped into isolation or depression may be a way of bearing fruit. Encouraging a divorced person to seek a support group may be a way of bearing fruit. Helping at St. Anthony’s Dining Room or other outreach activity may be fruit bearing. Being compassionately present to a woman who has had an abortion, and encouraging her to seek the healing ministry of the Church can be life giving for her.

As we gather at the Eucharist, God again reminds us that we are chosen, covenanted people dear to the heart of God. We hear again that we are God’s one and only, especially if our week has been one of disappointment, struggle or failure. In God’s Word and in sharing the body and blood of Jesus, God again patiently coaxes us and empowers us to respond as much beloved people. And so we give thanks for being God’s one and only.

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