

TWENTY SEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

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Sunday The Twenty-Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

Oct. 8 The Produce of our Vineyard

A reflection developed from a text by Sr. Dianne Bergant

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9 Accepting God's Care for Us

A reflection taken from a sermon by St. Basil the Great

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THE PRODUCE OF OUR VINEYARD

A reflection developed from a text by Sr. Dianne Bergant

This Sunday's readings feature two vineyard parables. Isaiah's reminds us that we are God's vineyard and that God has taken very great care in providing all we need to flourish. This more easily understood if we picture the obstacles that face those who do agriculture in Israel. In the first place, there are rocks everywhere. Ensuring a vineyard will flourish means clearing away what seem like endless rocks so one can properly spade up the earth and prepare it for the rootstocks from which the vines will grow. The second is that our God not only takes endless pains to prepare a place for us to grow but that God would protect us from predatory people and animals—that's why there's a tower in the vineyard. It probably also symbolized Jerusalem and the Temple from which God was thought to watch over us.

Isaiah's parable focuses attention on God's relation to us and on God's loving concern while Jesus' parable focuses attention on our response to God's care. God asks that we "give him fruit when the time for the harvest comes". Pause here and ask: What harvest does our God expect? We know from Jesus' other teachings that God expects mutual love and concern. We are to love one another with the same care that we love ourselves. But upon whom do those entrusted with the vineyard lavish their cares? They care for themselves!

Notice what Jesus takes for granted. God has entrusted the vineyard, God's chosen friends, to our care. This is our mission. If we spend our energies only on our own well-being we aren't fulfilling it. We sometimes get so bound up in ourselves that we even mistreat and harm those we should care for. Are others obstacles to getting what we want?

If we won't do our mission what can God do but give it to others who will carry it out? Are we walking in the way that brings upon us God's blessing? The answer is found in the ways that we actually and practically love others. Do you work to see that they flourish as much as possible? You want to do that for yourself, so you must do it for others, if you would be faithful to the task God has given you.

ACCEPTING GOD'S CARE FOR US

A reflection taken from a homily by St. Basil the Great

We only need to think carefully and thoughtfully about a vineyard to understand God's care for us and what it requires of us. Think of the various ways God has used the image of a vineyard in Scripture. He is instructing us. God is, after all, like a vinedresser and we are like shoots growing on the vine God tends. Each of us has been grafted into God's Church by faith and that has been done so we will bear much fruit.

Throughout the Scriptures the Lord continually likens us to shoots on a vine. "*My beloved*", says Isaiah, "*had a vineyard on a fertile hillside.*" Then he adds, "*I put a hedge around it*". God's hedge is made of commandments and is intended to give us security. Indeed, "*the angels of the Lord encamp around those who fear him*" and that means God gives us special protectors. Besides, we are also given teachers and prophets and apostles so as to surround us with a strong a palisade as possible.

In addition, the Lord has raised our thoughts to heaven by means of the examples of the saints of past times. God kept them from sinking to the earth where they would be trampled on and God wills that bonds of love, like the tendrils of a vine, should always attach us to our neighbors and enable us to depend on one another. Always climbing upward as vines grow on trees, we reach lofty heights clinging to one another and those who have gone before us.

But it is also necessary that vines be weeded and pruned. We have to allow our God to do this to and for us. To be spiritually weeded and pruned is to have to renounce worldly ambitions and like things that burden the heart. Anyone who has renounced the love of material things and attachment to possessions, or who has come to regard them as unimportant and contemptible, sees that the wretched glory of this world is like a weed and something to be pruned away.

This frees us from the burden of purely earthly aspirations so we can climb the tree of Christ's cross. We don't try to show off our deeds. We bear fruit best by reserving the display of the fruit we bear for the true vinedresser, our God. Now indeed we know the way to Heaven and to everlasting life.

RETURNING GOD'S LOVE

A reflection taken from a homily by St. Gregory Palamas

Exhortations are commonly given in two ways. Some are threatening, speaking of a punishment that awaits those who are careless or sinful so as to frighten them into changing their ways. Some speak of the rewards prepared for the just, to make those who are under instruction eager henceforth to live a good and upright life. This second way is how our God is now working with us. Yes, he has threatened those who have gone astray, but he doesn't end his exhortations there; he bids the straying give up what is useless and gains nothing but misery, and choose instead what will be of profit.

God treats us like tillers of the soil, but tillers who are sowing justice and cultivating it in the hope of reaping the fruit of life everlasting. As St. Paul writes, "*Whatever we sow we shall also reap; those who sow evil will reap evil*". But the just will have salvation and life, and in their full measure. They have gathered the grapes "*that gladden the human heart*". Besides this, those who want to win God's approval must open their minds and hearts to receive the light of true knowledge, which is lacking in those who worship creation rather than the creator.

How can we best go about sowing justice, reaping the fruit that is everlasting life, and receiving the bright light of knowledge? Isaiah answers the question by telling us, "*Seek the Lord until the fruits of justice come to you*"! There is no special place where we have to seek God—it would be foolish to think that since God isn't contained in any one place. No, God is to be sought by the dispositions of our soul and self, by the eagerness of our minds toward doing whatever pleases God and by reverence and clear knowledge in which there is nothing deserving of correction. When these things come to us the fruits of justice come to us. When one has found God in this way one is in possession of every other blessing in addition. Trust in God and seek God with all your mind and heart.

SEEKING PEACE IN GOD

A reflection from the journal of St. Pope John XXIII

Silence and peace. What a difference between the insistent and fretful clamor of the city and the solitude of a monastery. My soul feels at rest. Think of how many, over the years, have looked out from this window on the little lake. It was rather stormy last night but is calm again on this uncertain morning.

It is good to think of the changes in life, and especially those which service of the Church brings. The last person who came here is now an archbishop under a Communist government and is under fire.

How grateful I should be to the Savior who—without any merit of mine, or perhaps with the merit of a serene and trustful effort to seek his will in all things rather than my own, has led me here and granted me this peace in my heart. If all us poor mortals understood how precious is abandonment of self, which liberates life from its heaviest burdens and makes it more free and useful in the service of God, how much happier they would be.

I spoke of this last night to the monks, who welcomed me in their Chapter House, and Abbot Dupriez said he was very grateful for my thought. To feel called to work for the salvation of the world, and to know how to direct one's actions, even the most intimate of them, to the common good, which is also the service of the universal Church, confers such grandeur on our personal lives and gives us such inner satisfaction. It fully justifies the life made up of silence and prayer and daily tasks led by these monks.

They are better off than they would be thrown into a busy pastoral life. This abbey has the tombs of the House of Savoy, great but unable to escape the judgment of God and of history. Yet God still saves souls and glorifies the Gospel despite our evil deeds. I go down to celebrate mass to obtain grace, forgiveness and peace for all.

SERIOUSNESS IN SEEKING GOD

A reflection taken from a sermon by Cardinal Newman

We need to stop making empty excuses and all this foolish looking for some outward thing to change our life. If our life is to be changed it has to begin from within and be from God's grace.

If we do not love powerfully it is because we have not wished to, tried to, and prayed to love God. We have not carried that longing and idea in our mind day by day, even in the little matters of the day, while lamenting all the while our lack of love. We have been too indolent and sluggish to try to love God in little things—beginning at the beginning.

We have been like persons who can't persuade themselves to get up in the morning and wait to be changed once and for all by some great experience coming from without. We want to change without taking the trouble to change ourselves.

Do you complain your situation isn't really suited to properly religious feelings, or that you have too many cares, or too few special religious experiences? Do you look forward to a time when religion will come easy? Perhaps that's the way you looked forward as a child to being an adult. Did you think that it was natural for the old to be religious and didn't cost them effort or trouble? Haven't you as an adult put away such foolish and deceitful notions?

Instead of giving ourselves to God we're waiting "in the marketplace" for God to come and "make it happen". Well, let's get ourselves going like reasonable and responsible persons, before it is too late. Let's admit that the only way to get to heaven is to love heaven. The sight of Jesus won't move us; remember that it didn't move Judas. A prophecy won't do the trick; remember that it didn't convert Balaam. Why did Satan fall, being an archangel? Reason will not do it, for to some Greeks the Gospel was foolishness. Nor will excited feelings convert us; for there are those who hear the word with joy and excitement and yet soon fall away.

Let us be clear that nothing but the love can make us believe in God or obey God. Let us pray to God, who has prepared such good things for those who love, to pour into our hearts a love that places God above all things. That is how we obtain God's promises.

THE DANGER OF FALLING ASLEEP

A reflection taken from a sermon by St. Caesarius of Arles

Those who close their eyes to the demands of love have fallen asleep. Perhaps it is due to a desire for worldly pleasure. In any case, be watchful in eating, drinking, partying or gambling lest these pleasures lead to evils of every kind. Love of God and of God's law must come first of all. To love God means to keep the commandments with all your heart and soul and your neighbor as yourself.

My friends, to widen our hearts we cannot depend only on ourselves. Ask God to help you love one another—everyone without exception and not just your friends but your enemies as well. We love not just because the other is a brother or sister but so that all may become such. We pray that no one may become our enemy but if you all as you love brothers and sisters and friends, you love enemies in a way that makes them become friends.

Some may already share faith with you, so if they live virtuously you should love them as people who have been changed into friends by God. Suppose you love people who are not yet believers in Christ, or believe in Christ but do not yet love Christ. You must love even such people; love them as brothers and sisters. They are yet fully brothers or sisters but by your kindness they may become such.

I would ask you to consider, and understand, where it is that true pleasure for mind and heart are to be found. Strength of body and mind, fruitful work, achievement, charm, good food and drink—all these when accompanied by love bring true pleasure. If this is granted us while we are still wayfarers what delights will be ours when we reach our heavenly homeland?

Through the sweetness of love our Lord has given us a taste of heaven. Let us, with Christ's help, make every effort to preserve that love in all its perfection, so that, after our pilgrimage through this world, when we reach our eternal homeland, we may deserve to enjoy its delights fully. We ask this through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

THE PROPHETIC ROLE OF MARY

From Journeying with the Lord by Carlo Cardinal Martini

The Magnificat is the joyous hymn Mary proclaims at her encounter with Elizabeth. Mary, feeling herself welcomed by her kinswoman, feeling herself understood in her maternity by the work of the Spirit, breaks into a song of joy, an exaltation of God's work in history.

If we closely examine the structure of the Magnificat, we see that its central part is composed using a series of verbs in the past tense: "The Almighty *has done* great things. God *has shown* the power of his arm. God *has come* to the help of Israel." These verbs indicate actions which have already happened.

Yet Mary says these words when she has just begun to experience God's greatness within her. And while she was proclaiming them the proud had not been pulled down from their thrones, nor princes from theirs, nor were the hungry filled with good things. Jesus had not even proclaimed how blessed are the poor.

This canticle, then, can be viewed as a prophecy. It could be said that a prophecy in the remote past is a proclamation of events which, in part, must be verified in time to come, events which the prophet already sees completed because she is standing, so to speak, at God's side. The canticle expresses the joy in Mary's heart which began with the goal of God's salvific action accomplished in her.

Now this action, for Mary, concluded in her Assumption to God. When Mary speaks this prayer called the Magnificat, she has not yet experienced the fullness of God's great work in her. But she is sure of it and can describe the reality as that of an already completed plan. Blessed is she who *has* believed. We too can contemplate Mary as the fulfillment of God's plan. She revives our hope in the power of God's loving plan that works throughout history to bring salvation. Prophecy is about hope. We see our own hope in Mary.