

THE TWENTY-SEVENTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

8-14 October 2023

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Sunday

GOD'S TENDER LOVE CALLS TO US

A Reflection on Scriptures on God's Vineyard by Dianne Bergant

In painting pictures of vineyards, the scriptures lead us through two themes. They are God's tender loving care for us and the undependability of those who would care for us. Like good theologians, the biblical writers used what they knew from experience to tell us about God and God's dealings with us.

Isaiah, for instance, says "My friend had a vineyard"; the friend is really God. He talks about the great effort put forth in preparing the soil necessary for a rich harvest. God's commitment to this vineyard is painstaking. When all was completed he gave the care of its growth to us. The psalms reinforce this description of God's providential care. God uprooted the vine from "foreign" soil and carefully planted it where it could thrive. But despite everything, the previous vineyard was violated. One gets the sense that the vineyard was responsible for its own devastation.

The Gospels continue and build on these themes. In Jesus' parable, for instance, attention is focused on those to whom the vineyard was entrusted. The unscrupulous tenants plotted to appropriate the whole harvest for themselves. There seems to have been a law in Israel that in the absence of the owner those who were able to secure immediate possession could claim the property. The tenants were well-positioned to make this move.

But none of these texts present God as an absentee landowner, unconcerned with the vineyard. But it is God's disappointment that leads to the ultimate dismantling of the once-cherished land. It was God who broke down the walls, allowing every passerby to pluck the fruit and letting animals overrun it. Divine anger is most clearly depicted in the Gospel parable.

What is the message? The vineyard is the House of Israel. The vineyard is God's People to which God will come to inaugurate the Kingdom. In every instance, God goes to great lengths to prepare a wondrous blessing. But those who should have enjoyed this blessing defy God's plan. The Gospel states that God's blessings will endure into the reign of God. We are tenants on the land with obligations to the landowner. Paul (e.g.) tells us to commit ourselves to "whatever is true, .. honorable just .. pure .. holy.. and gracious".

In inviting us to enjoy the riches of this vineyard, God has shown us tender loving care in unfathomable measure. All God asks in return is faithfulness, not simply obedience to impersonal laws. God seeks the kind of faithfulness that wells up in us when we know that we are loved and cherished and cared for; the kind of faithfulness that responds wholeheartedly to God's love. That is what is asked of us each day.

Monday

DISCIPLES OF THE WAY

From the Angelus Message of Pope Francis on July 10, 2022

The Gospel of today's Liturgy recounts the parable of the Good Samaritan (cf. *Lk* 10:25-37). In the backdrop is the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Jericho along which lies a man who had been beaten badly and robbed by brigands. A priest passing by sees him but does not stop. A Levite, someone who performed services in the temple, does the same thing. "But a Samaritan", the Gospel says, "*as he journeyed*, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion" (v. 33). This is what God feels every time he sees us in a problem, in sin, in misery. "He had compassion". The Evangelist makes it a point to specify that this Samaritan *was on a journey*. So, even though he had his own plans and was heading towards a distant destination, this Samaritan does not come up with an excuse but allows himself to get involved with what had happened along the road. Isn't the Lord teaching us to do just that? To look off into the distance, to our final destination, while paying close attention to the steps to take here and now in order to get there.

It is significant that the first Christians were called "*disciples of the Way*" (cf. *Acts* 9:2). In fact, believers strongly resemble the Samaritan. The believer is on a journey, he is a wayfarer. Believers know they have not "arrived", but they want to learn each day, following the Lord Jesus who said: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (*Jn* 14:6). The disciple of Christ walks along following Him and thus becomes a "disciple of the Way". He or she goes after the Lord, who is not sedentary but is always on the way. Along the way, he or she meets people, heals the sick, and visits villages and cities. The Lord was always on the move.

The "disciple of the Way" observes, his or her way of thinking and of acting gradually changes, becoming more and more conformed to that of the Master. Walking in Christ's footsteps, the disciple becomes a wayfarer and — like the Samaritan — learns *to see* and *to have compassion*. First of all, *to see*: his eyes are open to reality, not egotistically closed in on the circle of his own thoughts. Unlike the priest and the Levite who see the unfortunate man, but pass by as if they do not see him, they look the other way. The Gospel teaches us to see — it leads us to correctly understand reality, overcoming preconceptions and dogmatism each day. So many believers take refuge behind dogmatisms to defend themselves from reality. Then, it teaches us to follow Jesus, because following Jesus teaches us *to have compassion* — to become aware of others, especially those who suffer, those who are most in need, and to intervene like the Samaritan, not to pass by but to stop.

Faced with this Gospel parable, it can happen that we might blame others or blame ourselves, comparing them to the priest or the Levite — or even blame ourselves, counting our own failures to pay attention to our neighbors. But I would like to suggest another type of exercise to you all, not one that finds fault, no. Certainly, we must recognize when we have been indifferent and have justified ourselves. We must acknowledge this, it is a mistake. But let us ask the Lord to help us overcome our selfish indifference and put ourselves on the Way. Let us ask him to see and to have compassion. This is a grace we need to ask of the Lord: "Lord, that I might see, that I might have compassion just like you see me and have compassion on me"— that we might have compassion on those whom we encounter along the way, above all on those who suffer and are in need, to draw near to them and do what we can do to give them a hand.

Tuesday

HOW JESUS CALLS PEOPLE TO FOLLOW HIM

A reflection by Fr. J-M. Tillard, OP

When one gives careful thought to what the gospel accounts tell us about those who welcomed the word of Jesus and became his disciples, we discover that the most common way to follow him is to stay at home among one's ordinary duties. Indeed, we find that Jesus ordered some to do this and even refused to allow them to leave their homes and folk and follow him wherever he went.

Remaining at home is, in fact, the usual way of welcoming the good news and responding to it wholeheartedly. One doesn't forsake one's usual lifestyle but stays at home and continues in one's trade or occupation. They were, in fact, disciples like Mary, the mother of Jesus, and like Mary and Martha, the sisters of Lazarus.

Who would venture to say that these three didn't love Jesus in the deepest way imaginable? Who could say that Mary, his mother, in her everyday life as a woman in an obscure village was not leading a life of holiness? On what grounds could one argue that Martha, Mary and Lazarus were less holy than the sons of Zebedee whom Jesus called to leave everything in order to follow him?

The Gospels point out that some of those who stayed at home remained unswervingly faithful to Jesus, whereas Peter and the apostles took to their heels and betrayed him. The stay-at-home group may seem mysterious and elusive to us because we have heard again and again about leaving everything for Christ, but those he calls to follow him while remaining where they are when called to be disciples are also with him as they do this. It doesn't seem that those called to leave everything are always more perfect on this account. Indeed, rivalries sprang up among the Twelve, one of them handed Jesus over to his enemies, and Peter three times denied being Jesus' disciple at all.

What is supremely important is declaring and living in a way that says, "One thing alone is necessary!" Jesus is that one thing necessary. He can fill the whole of one's life, leading one to everything one longs for and desires. It is not words that proclaim this, nor even extraordinary actions, but obedience to God and living as a person who dwells in God's kingdom in obedience.

There are, then, at least two distinct ways of living the Good News that this kingdom has been inaugurated. Both are ways of holiness. Indeed, in many ways the monastic life combines both of them; one gives up everything and then proceeds to live in a settled way doing ordinary occupations. It seems that no matter what we do and what we leave or don't leave behind, the important thing is that all be done in service of the Kingdom of God and as a way of praising and giving glory to our God and Savior.

Wednesday

MERCY FIRST AND FOREMOST

From the Morning Meditation of Pope Francis on 6 October 2015

Pope Francis spoke about the risk of failing to understand and accept the mercy of God. He also recommended not being so obstinate and rigid as to consider as more important one's own preaching, one's own thoughts, and "that whole list of commandments" that one must make others observe. The Pope's message was a call to obey God's will, to let his mercy act, and not to defy it.

The Pontiff then pointed out that "the character who resists is the prophet Jonah", who "truly was an obstinate man". The day's Readings were taken from the very book that bears his name. Jonah, the Pope explained, "had his ideas, his own ideas, and no one — not even God! — could make him change his mind". The Readings from the last two days' Liturgy told us of "when the Lord sent him to Nineveh to preach for the conversion of Nineveh, and he fled in the opposite direction, toward Spain". Then came "the shipwreck and the whole story that we know" (1:1-2:2, 10).

"After that experience", the Pontiff said, rereading the passage (3:1-10), Jonah "learns that he must obey the Lord: 'Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city'". Jonah then "obeys, he goes and preaches. He preaches so well: so much is the grace of God with him that the city converts, does penance, changes its way of life". Truly, "he performs a miracle, because in this case he has abandoned his obstinacy and obeyed the will of God, and he has done as the Lord commanded him".

In the "third chapter, Nineveh converts and, facing this conversion Jonah, this man who is not docile to the Spirit of God, becomes angry". Scripture states that "it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry", and even rebuked the Lord: "is this not what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish for I knew that thou art a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in all steadfast love, and repentest of evil".

Thus, Pope Francis summarized, "The first chapter is resistance to the mission that the Lord entrusted to him: 'Go and preach, so that they may convert'. And he is resistant". Then, "the second chapter is obedience, and when one obeys, miracles happen". Thus, Jonah's obedience to the will of God is the conversion of Nineveh.

Finally, "the third chapter: there is resistance to the mercy of God". Jonah turns to the Lord as if to say: "I did all the work of preaching, I did my task well, and you forgive them?". His heart, Pope Francis pointed out, has a "hardness that does not allow God's mercy to enter: my preaching is more important, my thoughts are more important, that whole list of commandments that I must make [them] observe — everything, everything, everything — is more important than the mercy of God".

And "this drama", the Pontiff affirmed, "even Jesus experienced it with the doctors of the law who did not understand why he would not let that adulterous woman be stoned" and why "he went to supper with tax collectors and sinners". The point is that "they did not understand his mercy". Jonah says: "you are merciful and compassionate", but "he does not approve".

The Pontiff exhorted, "Let us pray that the Lord enables us to understand what his heart is like, what 'mercy' means, what it means when he says: 'I want mercy, not sacrifice'". This is why, the Pope concluded, "In the collect prayer of the Mass we asked a great deal with that really beautiful phrase: 'Pour out your mercy upon us', because God's mercy is understood only when it has been poured out onto us, onto our sins, onto our miseries".

Thursday

A WAY OUT

From CHRISTUS VIVIT, A Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation to Young People and to the Entire People of God by Pope Francis

... I have taken time to look at the reality of young people in today's world. ... I do not claim to be exhaustive in this analysis. I encourage communities to examine, respectfully and seriously, the situation of their young people, in order to find the most fitting ways of providing them with pastoral care.

I remind you of the good news we received as a gift on the morning of the resurrection: that in all the dark or painful situations, there is a way out. For example, it is true that the digital world can expose you to the risk of self-absorption, isolation and empty pleasure. But don't forget that there are young people even there who show creativity and even genius. That was the case with the Venerable Carlo Acutis.

Carlo was well aware that the whole apparatus of communications, advertising and social networking can be used to lull us, to make us addicted to consumerism and buying the latest thing on the market, obsessed with our free time, and caught up in negativity. Yet he knew how to use the new communications technology to transmit the Gospel, to communicate values and beauty.

Carlo didn't fall into the trap. He saw that many young people, wanting to be different, really end up being like everyone else, running after whatever the powerful set before them with the mechanisms of consumerism and distraction. In this way they do not bring forth the gifts the Lord has given them; they do not offer the world those unique personal talents that God has given to each of them. As a result, Carlo said, "Everyone is born as an original, but many people end up dying as photocopies". Don't let that happen to you!

Don't let them rob you of hope and joy, or drug you into becoming a slave to their interests. Dare to be more, because who you are is more important than any possession. What good are possessions or appearances? You can become what God your Creator knows you are if only you realize that you are called to something greater. Ask the help of the Holy Spirit and confidently aim for the great goal of holiness. In this way, you will not be a photocopy. You will be fully yourself.

... You need to realize one basic truth: being young is not only about pursuing fleeting pleasures and superficial achievements. If the years of your youth are to serve their purpose in life, they must be a time of generous commitment, whole-hearted dedication, and sacrifices that are difficult but ultimately fruitful.

If you are young in years, but feel weak, weary, or disillusioned, ask Jesus to renew you. With him, hope never fails. You can do the same if you feel overwhelmed by vices, bad habits, selfishness, or unhealthy pastimes. Jesus, brimming with life, wants to help you make your youth worthwhile. In this way, you will not deprive the world of the contribution that you alone can make, in all your uniqueness and originality.

Yet let me also remind you that, "when we live apart from others, it is very difficult to fight against concupiscence, the snares and temptations of the devil, and the selfishness of the world. Bombarded... by so many enticements, we can grow too isolated, lose our sense of reality and inner clarity, and easily succumb". This is especially the case with young people, for whenever you are united, you have marvelous strength. Whenever you are enthused about life in common, you are capable of great sacrifices for others and for the community. Isolation, on the other hand, saps our strength and exposes us to the worst evils of our time.

Friday

MISUNDERSTANDING JESUS

From the Angelus Message of Pope Francis on June 10, 2018

The Gospel reading shows a misunderstanding that Jesus had to face.

The scribes were men educated in the Sacred Scriptures and charged with explaining them to the people. Some of them were sent from Jerusalem to Galilee, where Jesus' reputation was beginning to spread, in order to discredit him in the eyes of the people: to play the role of gossips, to discredit the other, to remove his authority, to do this awful thing. And they were sent to do this. And these scribes arrived with a specific and terrible accusation — they spared no means; they went straight to the point and said: "He is possessed by Beelzebul, and by the prince of demons he casts out the demons". That is, the prince of demons is the one who drives Him, which is more or less tantamount to saying: "He is possessed by demons". In fact, Jesus healed many sick people, and the scribes wanted to make others believe that he did so not with the Spirit of God — as Jesus did — but with that of the Evil One, with the power of the devil. Jesus reacted with firm and clear words; he did not tolerate this, because those scribes, perhaps without realizing it, were falling into the gravest sin: denying and blaspheming against God's Love which is present and active in Jesus. And blasphemy, the sin against the Holy Spirit, is the one unforgivable sin — as Jesus said — because it comes from closing the heart to God's mercy which acts in Jesus.

But this episode contains an admonishment that is useful to all of us. Indeed, it can happen that deep envy of a person's goodness and good works can drive one to falsely accuse him or her. Here there is true, lethal poison: the malice with which, in a premeditated manner, one wants to destroy the good reputation of the other. May God free us from this terrible temptation! And if, by examining our conscience, we realize that this weed is sprouting within us, let us go straight away to confess it in the Sacrament of Penance, before it grows and produces its evil effects, which are incurable. Be careful, because this attitude destroys families, friendships, communities, and even society.

Saturday

MARY IS A WOMAN, A MOTHER, AND A MESTIZA

**From the Homily of Pope Francis on the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe,
12 December 2019**

Mary is a woman. She is a woman, a lady as the *Nican Mapohua* says, a woman par excellence. She presents herself as a woman and she presents herself with a message from someone else, hence as a woman and a disciple. Saint Ignatius liked to call her 'Our Lady'. And it is so simple that it does not presume anything else: she is a woman, a disciple.

Over time, Christian piety has always tried to exalt her with new titles: they were filial titles, loving titles of the People of God, which however did not mention her as being a woman-disciple.

Saint Bernard used to say that when we speak of Mary, there can never be enough praise; titles of praise but they never touched upon her humble discipleship. A disciple. Faithful to her Teacher who is her Son, the only Savior, she never wished to appropriate anything of her Son for herself. She never presented herself as a co-Savior. No, a disciple. And there is a Holy Father who goes around saying that the discipleship of motherhood is worthier. These are issues for theologians, but a disciple. She never took anything from her son for herself. She served him because she is a mother. She gives life in the fullness of time to this Son born of woman.

Mary is our Mother. She is the Mother of our people. She is the Mother of us all. She is the Mother of the Church, but she is also the image of the Church. And she is the Mother of our hearts, of our souls. There is a Holy Father who says that what can be said of Mary, can also be said in its own way of the Church and in its own way of our souls. Because the Church is feminine and our soul has this ability to receive grace from God, and in a certain sense, the Fathers saw the Church as a woman. We cannot think of the Church without this Marian principle.

When we research the role of women in the Church, we can follow the path of functionality because women have functions to perform in the Church. But this is only half the journey.

Women in the Church achieve more with this Marian principle which "maternalizes" the Church and transforms it into Holy Mother Church.

Mary as a woman, Mary as a Mother, without any other essential title. The other titles — let us think of the Litanies of Loreto — are titles sung by children in love with their Mother, but they do not mention the essential nature of Mary's being: woman and mother.

And the third word that I would attribute to her as I gazed upon her: she wanted to be a mestiza (mixed race) for us, she chose to appear as a mestiza. And not only to Don Juan Dieguito but also to the people. She chose to appear as a mestiza in order to be the Mother of all. She made herself mixed for all of humanity. Why? Because she made a mestizo of God. And this is the great mystery: Mother Mary made a mestizo of God, true God, and true man, in her Son.

When they tell us that we should declare her as such or come up with another dogma, let us not lose ourselves in chatter. Mary is a woman, she is Our Lady, Mary is the Mother of her Son and of the Holy Mother hierarchical Church, and Mary is mestiza, a woman of our people, one with a "mixed-race" God.

May she speak to us as she spoke to Juan Diego with these three titles: with tenderness, with feminine warmth, and with a closeness of "mixedness". Amen.