

Sunday October 4th, Twenty-Seventh Sunday In Ordinary Time Year II

Good Morning from St. Bernadette's.

I hope everyone is keeping safe and well, and following all the guidance we receive to overcome these strange times, and continuing to pray for all our needs at this time.

Not the nicest of weather this weekend, but I guess we are into October!

Beautiful Scripture Readings for this Sunday, with another great Parable from our Blessed Lord about tenants in the vineyard, who abuse their mission.

God often spoke of his Chosen People as a vineyard, which he had planted and cares for. Psalm 79 today tells of how God prepared a land for his vine, his people Israel, and cared for them so that they would flourish. But the prophet Isaiah laments that this vineyard which the Lord loves so much, has not produced the goods. In Isaiah 5:1-7, he reminds the people that the privilege of being the chosen People of God brings the responsibility of living as God requires, of producing the fruit he expects from his people: the choice wine of justice and integrity. Instead, the people have produced the sour wine of bloodshed and distress, injustice and oppression. And so the psalm tells how the Lord seems to have abandoned them, though in fact it is they who have turned away from God. The vineyard has ceased to be a vineyard, it no longer yields good wine; the people have stopped acting as God's Chosen People. And so in the psalm the people promise to return to the Lord, they ask God to save them and promise never to leave him again.

Jesus uses this same image to speak of himself and his mission in Matthew 21:33-34. He has come to call the people back to their true selves, to enable them to produce this fruit of justice which God expects. He speaks a damning parable to the religious leaders, to those entrusted with ensuring that the life of the people is according to God's expectations. He tells them that they have abused their responsibility, that they persistently reject the word of God, thinking only of their own profit and interests, not those of God. They have focussed on religion at the expense of justice and truth; they have stressed the importance of external piety and religious rules while stifling the message of the prophets, that actions and right living constitute the true worship which God wants. They were encouraging people to practise 'religion' rather than practise justice and love. Religion without a spirit of love, justice and integrity is a vineyard without wine, a waste of time and space.

When people ask us what it means to be Catholic, perhaps the natural thing is to speak in terms of religious faith and practice: prayer, Mass, the sacraments, and it was interesting how we almost had to

redefine ourselves during the first period of Lockdown, when many of those things were taken away from us. Beneath these religious expressions must be a lifestyle which can be summed up in the word love, and the greater practice of the first two commandments, loving God and loving our neighbour.

This Parish is the Lord's vineyard. Whether we are able to receive the Sacraments or not, we, the vines that make up the Parish have to produce good wine. Let's pray today that the good work that takes place every day in this Parish of St. Bernadette - and continued and continues in many different and inventive ways during our period of lockdown and restriction - will continue to grow, and a spirit of love, justice, integrity and community will abound. And praying is just one of the ways in which, with God's help, we can make that happen.

Lord, you give us the unwavering call to do justice.

You encourage us to be faithful workers in your vineyard.

You tell us to defend the cause of the fatherless and the widow.

To love the foreigner residing among us.

To provide for the hungry, thirsty, and naked.

To love our enemy.

May your Spirit fill us with hope.

Remind us that we are good enough for you,

so that in all things, we will follow your will,

and take up the call to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with you.

Through the same Christ our Lord.

Amen.

So let us sing 'This Is My Body Broken For You.'

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WCuA_ixkZOW

All this talk of wine and vineyards made me do a little exploring about what these vineyards which Jesus has been using in his Parables for the past month were really like. Mentioned more than any other plant in the entire Bible, the grape vine was very important culturally and economically in biblical times. Because of its centrality in everyday life, it is often used symbolically in Scripture. A fruitful vine was a symbol of obedient Israel, while wild grapes or an empty vine spoke of Israel's disobedience.

The woody vine that produced the wine is only cultivated with effort and hard work, and today's first reading, while being very symbolic, is factually accurate about the process. Typically grown on a hill, a vineyard needed to be cleared of many stones which are common in Israel. Only then could vines be planted. A wall or hedge built around the vineyard, along with a watch tower, kept thieves at bay, and the plants required constant pruning in order to bear fruit. The sweet fruit with white flesh, and green,

red, or purple skins, grows in clusters. The produce can be eaten fresh, or pressed for wine, with the pressed grapes added to the liquid before it would turn into vinegar, with the wine often mixed with stale cistern water to make it drinkable. It doesn't sound great – so it must have been doubly pleasing at the Wedding at Cana that Jesus' wine was considered to be the best wine of all.

There is actually a tradition of blessing wine on the Feast of St John, the Apostles and Evangelist (29th December), even though St. Vincent is actually the Patron Saint of Winegrowers. The blessing is actually rather lovely:

*Be so kind as to bless and consecrate with Your right hand, Lord,
this cup of wine, and every drink.
Grant that by the merits of Saint John the Apostle and Evangelist,
all who believe in You and drink of this cup may be blessed and protected.
Blessed John drank poison from the cup, and was in no way harmed.
So, too, may all who this day drink from this cup in honour of blessed John, by his merits,
be freed from every sickness by poisoning and from any harms whatever.
And, when they have offered themselves in both soul and body,
may they be freed, too, from every fault.
And may the blessing of almighty God, the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
descend upon this wine which He has made, and upon every drink, and remain always.
Amen.*

Any one feel like cracking open a bottle of Pinot Grigio? Cheers! The attached pic is the nearest I had on my laptop to an actual HolyLand Vineyard – it is actually I pic I took of the Garden of Gethsemane when I was in Jerusalem a few years ago.

Saturday evening's Mass was recorded and available on the YouTube at

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GYySDK388Uc&feature=youtu.be>

Texts for each day can be found at <http://universalis.com/mass.htm>

Once again many thanks for all your return mails. Apologies if I don't reply immediately, sometimes they seem to get lost (or kind of bunched up). Any suggestions for ways to keep our faith and spirits up at this time are most welcome!

And remember, St. Bernadette's is not closed, though the building is, most of the time. We're just doing things differently for a while, until we are allowed to gather together once more, more stronger, more faithful, more loving, more creative, and more grateful for the amazing community that is St. Bernadette's.

With love and faith in Jesus.

Fr. P.