

HOMILY FOR THE XXVII SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME – YEAR A

Is 5:1–7; Phil 4:6–9; Mt 21:33–43

The common theme of today's readings is the necessity of bearing fruit in the Christian life. The readings warn us about the consequences of spiritual sterility, ingratitude and wickedness.

In today's first reading, known as *Isaiah's Song of the Vineyard*, the prophet describes God's care for, and expectations of, His Chosen People. God's Chosen People failed to bear good fruit, in spite of all the blessings lavished upon them by their loving and forgiving God. They were poor tenants in the Lord's vineyard. Hence, God laments: "*I expected my vineyard to yield good grapes. Why did it yield sour grapes instead?*"

In the Responsorial Psalm (Ps 80), the Psalmist pleads with God to look down from heaven and "*take care of this vine,*" knowing that if anything good is to come from the vine, it will ultimately be the work of God and not of the people alone.

In the second reading, St Paul tells the Philippians about the high expectations he has for them. He reminds them that they need to become fruit-bearing Christians by praying, giving thanks to God, and practising justice, purity and graciousness in their daily lives.

In today's Gospel, Jesus tells an allegorical parable in which the landowner is God, the vineyard is Israel as God's special people, and the tenants are the political and religious leaders of Israel. The story emphasises the failure of the tenants—the Chosen People and their leaders—to produce fruits of righteousness, justice and mercy.

Through this parable, Jesus gives a theological explanation of Israel's history of gross ingratitude. He reminds us Christians that, since we are the "new" Israel, enriched with even greater blessings and provisions through the Church, we are expected to show our gratitude to God by bearing the fruits of the Kingdom and the fruits of the Holy Spirit in our lives, giving glory to God.

The Lord's vineyard at present is the Church, and we Christians are the tenants from whom God expects fruits of righteousness. The parable warns us that if we refuse to reform our lives and become spiritually fruitful, we too could be replaced, just as the old Israel was replaced by us.

As good tenants of God's vineyard, we need to pay serious attention to how we relate to others as loving fellow servants of our common Master. In the parable, the rent which the tenants refuse to pay represents the relationship with God and with the people of Israel which the religious leaders refused to cultivate.

This means that, before anything else, God looks at how well we fulfil our responsibilities towards one another as His children. The parable teaches us that, instead of glorying in our privileges and Christian heritage, we are called to deeds of love, compassion, patience, generous assistance, forgiveness and mercy. These are the personal and communal actions and attitudes that bear witness to our faith and invite others to discover and welcome the Kingdom of God.

Are we good fruit-producers in the vineyard of the Church? Jesus has given the Church everything necessary to make us fruitful Christians: the Bible, to know the will of God; the priesthood, to lead God's people in His ways; the Sacrament of Reconciliation, for the forgiveness of our sins; the

Holy Eucharist, as our spiritual food and drink; the Sacrament of Confirmation, for a dynamic life of faith; the Sacrament of Matrimony, for the sharing of love within families, the fundamental unit of the Church; and the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, to restore and strengthen spiritual life and to bring mental, emotional and physical healing, if that is God's will. We also have the example of thousands of saints who show us how to live our Christian vocation. We are expected to make use of these gifts and produce good fruits for God.

Are we fruit-producers in the vineyard of the family? By sharing our blessings with one another, by sacrificing our time and talents for the members of our family, by humbly and lovingly serving one another, by recognising and encouraging each other, and by honouring and lovingly obeying our parents, we become producers of "good fruit" in our families and give glory to God through our lives.

Are we ready to face these hard questions? Have we come close to fulfilling God's dream for us? What kind of grapes do we, as a parish community, produce? Are they sweet or sour? What is our attitude towards everything God has given us? Are we grateful stewards of all that God has entrusted to us, or are we like the ungrateful tenants who behaved as though they owned everything God had given them?

Do we practise justice every day of our lives? Do we recognise the righteousness of God, which keeps us from becoming self-righteous? Do we remember to show mercy? Is our parish a real sign of Jesus' presence and love? What kind of impact do we have on the people around us? Do we measure the quality of our parish by what happens during Mass, or by what happens when we leave the church? Obviously, both are important. But there cannot be one without the other. Our worship at the altar must bear fruit in the way we live our lives outside the church. The Lord has entrusted His vineyard to us. May He find in us good fruit—fruit of love, justice, mercy, forgiveness and generosity. And may everything we do bring glory to God.