



*Homily – 27th Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)<sup>i</sup>*

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My dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

In our readings for this holy Mass today, we hear two stories about vineyards. I guess that is something that we can relate to here in California, with all the wineries and vineyards that we have in our state!

These biblical stories — the prophet Isaiah’s song of the vineyard in the first reading, and Jesus’ parable in the Gospel — both work in two levels. That’s usually the way the Scriptures can be read. On the one level, these stories are trying to tell us something about the history of salvation, about God’s loving plan for the world.

Both stories describe God’s relationship with his chosen people.

And the point of both stories today is the same: God, like a man who plants a vineyard, made all sorts of provisions for his people so that they would grow and flourish and bear good fruit and make this world into a beautiful Kingdom. But he is disappointed because the people do not correspond to his love. They do not work with all the graces that he has given them. They do not bear good fruits.

That’s the one level. But today’s readings speak to us also about our own personal relationship to Jesus Christ and to God.

In the Scriptures, the “vine” is always a sign of both Israel and of each individual soul. Jesus Christ is the vine, and we are the branches joined to that vine. Each of us has been chosen by God — grafted onto this vine of Christ in Baptism. And we are called to grow on this vine and bear fruits.

My brothers and sisters, God wants our lives to bear a rich harvest of love. He wants us to bear good fruits from the gifts he has given us.

We are stewards, given responsibility for our own lives and for all the talents and blessings that God has entrusted to us. We have been given so much! Our faith and family. Our freedom. All the material gifts and the many opportunities that we have.

St. Paul said: “What do you possess that you have not received?”<sup>ii</sup>

And this is so true. Most of the time we just take all of these things that we have for granted. But, my brothers and sisters, we must remember that all that we have is a gift from God. St. Thérèse of Lisieux, the Little Flower, whose feast day we just celebrated yesterday, said: “Everything is a grace.”<sup>iii</sup>

The saints all know this, and we need to live with this same awareness. Everything we have is a gift of grace from our good God. But these gifts are not given to us to use selfishly.

What God expects from us in return for the gifts that he has given us is that we collaborate with him in building the Kingdom of love and truth in our world. He wants our lives to be filled with good deeds, acts of charity. He wants us to bear the good fruit of a strong and steady witness to our faith in our daily lives — in our homes, in our workplaces, in our communities.

As you probably noticed, I’m sure that you did, in this passage from the Gospel today — the tenants in Jesus’ parable are very selfish. They want to keep all the fruits for themselves. They do not want to offer anything back to the vineyard owner in thanksgiving. Now my brothers and sisters, we don’t want to be like them.

So these readings invite us to reflect, to meditate on our commitment to God and to others. We have received so many gifts. We have to correspond to God — bearing fruit for the glory of God and the service of our brothers and sisters.

Let us ask ourselves today: Are we being truly obedient to God’s will for our lives? Are we using the graces he gives us to bear good fruits in our everyday lives?

We are not talking about big accomplishments. The point is that every day we have a lot of opportunities to offer good fruits to God.

Our good fruits might mean a smile, or a friendly word to someone who needs encouragement. It might mean being patient with the different challenges we face in our daily lives. As simple as being patient with the traffic we face in the freeways of Los Angeles. It is not an easy task, is it! Or maybe not losing our cool during our morning drive to work. Or maybe being able to listen to someone or being quick to pardon someone who has offended us. Small little things that make a huge difference in our lives.

These little sacrifices and offerings we make help build our good habits and attitudes. They change the world around us, often in ways we cannot see and may never know about. Every little act of love we make, makes this world that much more a place of love and understanding. There is nothing too little to offer to God and to do for others.

In today's second reading, St. Paul tells us the kind of attitude we should have. We should be people of prayer and thanksgiving, keeping our hearts and minds on the things of Jesus Christ. St. Paul reassures us that we will have the peace of God in our hearts if we continue always to seek what is true and just.

So today, let us ask for the grace to bear good fruits in our spiritual lives, in our relationship with God, but also in our relationships with others.

In these days as we prepare ourselves for the new translation of the Roman Missal that we are going to start using in the first Sunday in Advent, in the month of November, maybe one practical thing that we need to reflect on, and make sure that we bear fruit as we prepare ourselves, our participation in the Holy Eucharist.

What an extraordinary gift! Jesus, really present, in the Blessed Sacrament! We can receive him in Holy Communion! Don't you think that in doing that we should bear fruits in a strong prayer life and then many acts of charity every day?

Finally, this is Respect Life Month and this is Respect Life Sunday. For the last 40 years, the Church here in the United States has dedicated October as the month when we reflect on the gift of life. This reminds us that we always need to pray and recommit ourselves to defending the lives and the dignity of the unborn children and the most vulnerable people in our society — the handicapped, the aged, the terminally ill.

So, with the help of the grace of God, let us recommit ourselves to be grateful for God's gifts, especially for the gift of life and to keep growing in our spiritual life — that every single moment of our life will be an act of thanksgiving for the many gifts we have received from God.

We ask Mary, Our Blessed Mother, to help us to be faithful and generous in corresponding to the grace of God, that our lives will be filled with good deeds of love and service to God and others.

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<sup>i</sup> Readings: Isa. 5:1–7; Ps. 80:9, 12–16, 19–20; Phil. 4:6–9; Matt. 21:33–43

<sup>ii</sup> 1 Cor. 4:7.

<sup>iii</sup> *Last Conversations* (ICS, 1977), 57.