

27th Sunday of Ordinary Time, Year A

Isaiah 5:1-7

Today's reading originated as a popular ballad which Isaiah himself may have sung at a harvest festival.¹⁵ The first verse and a half of this beautiful ballad is really a parable that draws on the Song of Songs where the bride is a garden, her neck like a watchtower, her breasts like a cluster of grapes and her kisses sweeter than wine.⁵

1Let me now sing of my friend, The "friend" is God.⁵ By calling God "friend" he conceals his identity. This gives a personal dimension to the betrayal.¹² **my friend's song concerning his vineyard.** The "vineyard" is Israel.⁵ My friend had a vineyard on a fertile hillside; The "fertile hillside" is Mt. Zion. It took great skill and care over a long period of time to build up a vineyard.⁵
2he spaded it, cleared it of stones, and planted the choicest vines; within it he built a watchtower, The "watchtower" was the Temple.⁵ **and hewed out a wine press. Then he looked for the crop of grapes, but what it yielded was wild grapes.** The grapes were not suitable for vintage despite the fact that what were planted were "the choicest vines." That is, the fault in the harvest is not with the divine Vintner who planted the vines with the intention of harvesting fruit for wine, but with the vines themselves. The clear meaning being that Israel has not been true to her calling to be a counter-cultural witness to the nations of steadfast worship of the One True God.¹ Consider Mt. 7:20: "By their fruits shall you know them." The Fruits of the Spirit are perfections that the Holy Spirit forms in us as the first fruits of eternal glory: Charity, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Generosity, Gentleness, Faithfulness, Modesty, Self Control and Chastity.² (CCC 1832)
3Now, inhabitants of Jerusalem and people of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard: The song asks the hearers to pass judgment as the vineyard owner pleads his case against the vineyard. The hearers would naturally agree with the owner that the vineyard should be destroyed because it was useless.⁶
4What more was there to do for my vineyard that I had not done? Why, when I looked for the crop of grapes, did it bring forth wild grapes?
5Now, I will let you know what I mean to do with my vineyard: take away its hedge, give it to grazing, break through its wall, let it be trampled! If Israel will not witness to the nations, the nations will trample her walls and come in and give witness to God's Judgment on her. In other words, there will be an enemy invasion (which turns out to be from Assyria).⁵ Israel, the unfaithful and unfruitful, shall be reduced to ruins; untended, uncultivated, arid and worthless and they have brought it on themselves.³ The words of the Psalm Response belong to us for WE are Israel and the judgment pronounced on her always stands as a warning to us. We need to bear fruit for the Lord, fruit that is worthy of vintage.¹ **6**Yes, I will make it a ruin: it shall not be pruned or hoed, but overgrown with thorns and briars; I will command the clouds not to send rain upon it. These proposed actions of the owner seem appropriate and reasonable.⁶
7The vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the people of Judah are his cherished plant; As the prophet explains that the vineyard is the house of Israel and the people of Judah are the plantings, the listeners find that they have been led to pass judgment on their own lack of response to God's word!⁶ **he looked for judgment, but see, bloodshed! For justice, but hark, the outcry!** God looked for "judgment" and "justice" which meant men who were doing the revealed will of God. In contrast, what he found was bloodshed, oppression, and disloyalty.⁶ Consider John 15:5-6: "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who lives in me and I in him, will produce abundantly, for apart from me you can do nothing. A man who does not live in me is like a

withered, rejected branch, picked up to be thrown in the fire and burnt.” God is wounded by the betrayal of an unfaithful people. The final lines convey the pained disillusionment of a God whose love is scorned and unrequited.¹³ It would be reasonable to interpret this song as prophesying God’s abandonment of Judah if the book of Isaiah left matters here. But we also have Isaiah 27:2-6 which is also a vineyard song, perhaps even an interpretation of today’s reading in the light of the end of the Babylonian captivity and the return of some of the exiles to Judah. And in this song God’s care and protection of the vineyard (Israel) is assured.¹⁴

Philippians 4:6-9

This letter of St. Paul’s was written in prison when the outcome of his appeal to the Emperor could not be foreseen. Yet, despite the gloom of prison and the grim uncertainty of the immediate future, the Letter breathes nothing but love and peace and joy.⁸ This sound advice is a wonderful prescription for fighting stress!

Brothers and sisters;

6Have no anxiety at all, Anxiety is fear. It does nothing to solve our dilemma and, indeed, makes it more difficult by sapping the strength from our attempts at a solution.³ Jesus also warned his disciples to put away all worrying cares. The reason for this is that we might steadily persevere in carrying out our call as followers of Christ. However, since no one can rise completely above care, the Apostle gives the following directions:⁸ **but in everything, by prayer and petition,** Constant dialogue with God in prayer is a good way to prevent anything robbing us of peace of soul, for prayer “regulates our affections”, St. Bernard teaches, “directs our actions, corrects our faults, guides our conduct, beautifies and orders our life; it brings with it knowledge of things divine and things human also. It determines what we ought to do and reflects on what we have done, in such a way that our heart never becomes wanton or in need of discipline.⁷ **with thanksgiving,** If we remember what God has done in the past, we have no reason to worry about the future.⁶ The Christian who is ready to thank God for everything that His Providence grants or refuses, will not be disturbed in soul or suffer any lessening of peace through the malice and buffeting of the world.⁸ **make your requests known to God.** Christ is glorified by what we ask the Father in his name.² (CCC 2633) The problem is not unanswered prayer, but rather, unoffered prayer!

7Then the peace of God St. Paul personifies this peace as a sentinel who guards our minds and hearts.⁶ **that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.** This peace of soul comes from being conscious of belonging altogether to God. It is a foretaste of heaven. It is the peace which Jesus left as a legacy to his Apostles. It is the peace which the world cannot give.⁸

8Finally, brothers and sister, whatever is true, These are the things on which a man can rely, the things which will not fail him or let him down.⁹ **whatever is honorable,** This refers to that which has the dignity of holiness upon it.⁹ **whatever is just, whatever is pure,** The word used here describes what is morally pure and undefiled. When this word is used ceremonially, it describes that which has been so cleansed that it is fit to be brought into the presence of God and used in the service of God.⁹ **whatever is lovely,** The mind of the Christian is set on things which call forth love, kindness, sympathy and forbearance rather than vengeance, punishment, bitterness, criticism, rebuke and resentment.⁹ **whatever is gracious,** The things that are fit for God to hear.⁹ **if there is any excellence** This refers to excellence of every kind.⁹ **and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.** We become what we expose ourselves to. What we bring into our minds determines what comes out through our words and actions. If we take in goodness, we will live a

life of goodness. We want to get rid of “stinking thinking”¹⁵ and remember: “garbage in, garbage out.”

9Keep on doing what you have learned and received and heard and seen in me. Here Paul is referring to his total dedication to the gospel of Christ.³

Then the God of peace will be with you. In verse 7 he talked about the “peace of God” but here he speaks of the “God of peace” who will be with those who live their lives in Christ Jesus.⁶

Fr. Gerald Ranek has a prayer that is based on this scripture: “I will have no anxiety about the outcome of this situation. I praise God and thank him that right answers are forthcoming and that a right out-working is assured.”

Matthew 21:33-43

The setting for this reading is Jerusalem near the end of Christ’s public ministry. The chief priests and elders questioned Jesus: by what authority did he act and who gave him such power. Jesus gave 7 answers that include 3 parables and 4 controversy stories. Last week we read the first parable about the two sons and this week is the second parable. It is an allegory which means that each of its details is important and symbolic.¹⁰ In the setting of the local Church for which Matthew wrote, this parable may have been used to support the belief that the Church had replaced Israel as God’s chosen people, and that the promises once made to Israel now belonged to the Church.¹⁴

33 Jesus said to the chief priests and the elders of the people: “Hear another parable. There was a landowner The landowner is God.¹⁰ who planted a vineyard, Israel is the vineyard.⁴ put a hedge around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a tower. The hedge helped keep out wild animals, the vat was used to crush the grapes and hold the wine. The tower was a watch-post and a shelter for the workers. He is essentially saying that effort had been put into this vineyard which has received God’s ceaseless and provident care.¹¹ Then he leased it to tenants The tenants are Israel’s leaders.¹⁰ and went on a journey.

34When vintage time drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants to obtain his produce.

35But the tenants seized the servants and one they beat, another they killed, and a third they stoned. The servants are the Old Testament prophets who were persecuted for warning Israel of its sins.¹⁰

36Again he sent other servants, more numerous than the first ones, but they treated them in the same way.

37Finally, he sent his son to them, thinking, ‘They will respect my son.’

38But when the tenants saw the son, they said to one another, ‘This one is the heir. Come, let us kill him and acquire his inheritance.’ When one died without a valid will, his property became unoccupied land that went to the first claimant and the tenants would have had the first opportunity to make the claim because of their occupation.⁴

39They seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. The son is Jesus, who will be thrown out of the vineyard and crucified outside the city.¹⁰

40What will the owner of the vineyard do to those tenants when he comes?”

41They answered him, “He will put those wretched men to a wretched death Their reply is their own destiny for God will put them to death when he judges Jerusalem in A.D. 70, at which time Roman troops marched on Jerusalem, destroying the city and the Temple.¹⁰ and lease his vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the proper times.” God will entrust the New Covenant kingdom to the other tenants in the Church.¹⁰

⁴² Jesus said to them, “Did you never read in the Scriptures: *The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; by the Lord has this been done, and it is wonderful in our eyes?* This is a reference to Psalm 118:22-23. Jesus is saying that he (the stone) is commissioned by God (the Lord’s doing), despite his rejection by Jerusalem (the builders). This scripture foresees that the Messiah will meet opposition from the leaders of his own people but the faithful will see in the work of Jesus, God’s marvelous deeds.¹⁰

⁴³Therefore, I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people what will produce its fruit.” God will transfer his kingdom from the leaders of the Old Covenant establishment to the shepherds of the New Covenant Church.¹⁰ These new people would be the faithful Jewish and Gentile followers of Jesus.¹

Some of the material for this commentary was taken from: (1) The Commentary Notes of Sean Innerst and Tim Gray, (2) “The Catechism Of The Catholic Church,” (3) “Workbook for lectors and gospel readers” by Aelred R. Rosser, (4) “The Jerome Biblical Commentary,” (5) “Isaiah” by John F. A. Sawyer, (6) “Workbook for lectors and gospel readers” by Lawrence E. Mick, (7) “The Navarre Bible: Captivity Epistles,” (8) “The Sunday Epistles And Gospels” by Monsignor Patrick Boylan, (9) “The Letters To The Philippians, Colossians, And Thessalonians” by William Barclay, (10) “Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Gospel of Matthew” With Introduction, Commentary, and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, (11) “The Parables Of Christ” by Charles J. Callan, O.P., (12) The St. Paul Center for Biblical Theology Online founded by Dr. Scott Hahn, (13) “Workbook For Lectors And Gospel Readers Cycle A” by Graziano Marcheschi with Nancy Seitz Marcheschi, (14) “Workbook for lectors and gospel readers Year A” by James L. Weaver, and (15) “The Bread of Life Catholic Bible Study” by Deacon Ken & Marie Finn.

In loving memory of Peg Schneller, who compiled these commentaries.