**“God in Search of us and Our Indifference”**

All our readings point us to how God has been in search of us. Instead of responding to His call, time and time again, humans have shown Him indifference. God has shown us in many ways how He would like to bring us to Himself like an eagle leads its broods by hovering over them with its wings spread out to protect and direct them. God not only want to lead us to Himself, He wants to care and protect us by guarding us as the apple of His eye.

But what does God get in return for His unfathomable love He has for us! He gets mostly those who only care about themselves. He gets those who do not care about their neighbor. He gets those who do their will and those who would not do His will by dying to self. But no matter how much we run away from God, He would never give up on us. Similarly as He took pride in Job, so will He take pride in those who do His will.

Our patron Saint Francis of Assisi whom we celebrate his feast day today, is an example of one of God’s creation who became the apple of God’s eyes. He gave up the pursuit of money, power, prestige and worldly pleasures to follow Jesus. He once said, ***“Let your way of life among the people be such that whoever sees or hears you, will glorify and praise our heavenly Father.”***

In our first reading, from Prophet Isaiah, we heard about the owner of a vineyard who chose the best location on a fertile hillside for his vineyard. He planted the best vines after removing all the stones that would hinder the roots from growing deep into the soil. He built a watchtower and provided servants who were the prophets He sent to them to lead them to Himself. He provided a beautiful wine press or banquet in anticipation of a bountiful harvest.

However, instead of the choosiest grapes He expected, what he saw at harvest time, were wild grapes. The wild grapes were people who were practicing idolatry. He was disappointed and wondered what else could he had done to harvest the good grapes He desired!

God through Isaiah indicates that this is the story of the Israelites the favored vine God chose as His people. He brought them out of slavery in Egypt removed the stones who were the Canaanites and other occupants of the promised Land. God expected them to be faithful to Him. Instead they turned away from Him and worshiped other gods. They became the bad wild grapes at harvest time. Instead of following His commandments, they engaged in injustice and all sorts of sinfulness.

God then let them know what He would do them. He was going to withdraw His grace He had showered over them and let them be torn apart by their enemies. Out of love for their salvation, He would allow them to go into captivity where they would suffer until they repent and cry out for His mercy. Why? Because would never give up on those who ask for His mercy.

Now, let us take a look at our Psalmist in our Responsorial Psalm, who gave us an insight as to what happened after God allowed the Israelites to suffer for their sins. The Psalmist first talked about what God had done for them after He brought them out of captivity in Egypt with awesome power and mighty deeds. The Psalmist lamented that why would God let evil befall His chosen people after all He had done for them?

The Psalmist called on God to once again protect the Israelites whom he referred to as the ***“son of man.”*** He asked for restoration after their repentance. The Psalmist made an empty promise that they would never turn away from God’s ways again. He indicated that they had an epiphany that it is only God who could save them.

From the story of the Israelites, we too should realize that only God can give us the true happiness that we are searching for. Money, power, and pleasure and all the other vices that exist in the world cannot bring us happiness. It is our response to God’s call that would give us happiness. Whatever we do in life is of any worth, only if it is in accord with God’s will. Go has chosen each any everyone of us for a mission in His vineyard.

Should we go on our own way and follow false values such as money, prestige earthly pleasures, we will become like thorn bushes that got choked up. Our only choice should be to embrace God’s will, thereby we will be assured of not mere justice from God, but His supreme generosity of the gift of eternal life.

In our Gospel reading, Jesus drew His parable with a little twist from the prophesy of Prophet Isaiah to illustrate to the chief priests and elders about their blindness, arrogance, and evil desire to kill Him who was the stone rejected who became the cornerstone. Their blindness comes from them not recognizing Him as the Messiah. Arrogance because they thought they knew it all which led them to kill all the prophets God sent to the house of Israel.

What Jesus is trying to teach us about God in this parable could be visualized in what happens in the Willamette Valley vineyard or in any other vineyard in the world. What all grape growers provide in growing their crop, is the vigilant care and attention they give in order to produce good grapes. However, as in every human endeavor, there would be disappointment. Such disappointment as might occur in a vineyard are of great disappointment because of the time, money, and effort that had been invested in other to have a good harvest.

However, as Jesus would put it, no grape grower could put more tender care and love into their vineyard as God does for His Church and the people He has invited to His eternal banquet. So we can only imagine how disappointing it is for God to receive at harvest time, ungrateful and sinful people who had abandoned His commandments. The disappointment can similarly be compared to parents who do so much for their children and in the end, were disappointed by how they turned out.

As we come to receive Jesus in the Eucharist, let us ask for His grace so we can become the apple of His eyes.