

Homily notes:

4th October 2020 - 27th Sunday in OT Year A 2020

In the great vine-growing regions of the world, it soon becomes apparent how vineyards are different from other forms of agriculture. The vine grower behaves towards the vineyard more like a passionate gardener than like a farmer. Vines are not a product that chops and changes with the years and seasons. Many vines can outlive their owners, and a little like human beings, they offer a different gift of fruit in their youth, mature years and old age.

The vineyard is a favourite image of God's people in both Old & New Testaments. It brings out the closeness of God to his people, the way he is to work with them to produce fruit, his long-term investment in their success. But things can go wrong. If the vineyard is not well cared for, if it is neglected, it will not produce good fruit. If those who are in charge keep the product for their own use, pretending it is their own not God's, then disaster will ensue and the vineyard will be taken from them.

This is the third Sunday Jesus has mentioned vineyards in his parables. In the 1st Reading Isaiah becomes a minstrel and sings a song rather like a love song, but which turns into a bitter lover (the owner) describing how he was jilted by his true love (the vines). It turns when the vine planted in choice, fertile soil and lavished with tender loving care, produces nothing but sour grapes. He feels very let down.

Jesus makes an important point in the parable, which is the ambition of the tenants to gain control of the ownership of the vineyard. If a landowner died intestate, ownership would pass to the tenants. That explains why they killed the son of the landowner.

Jesus confronted the leaders with the unpleasant news that they were trying to take over God's place rather than work in his service.

This weekend marks the end of the period of creation. Because of the corona virus pandemic, care of the creation for most has taken a back seat: indeed with all the PPE disposable-everything, plastic pollution will be infinitely worse. A serious question is 'what has humanity been doing to

the planet, the environment?’ The pandemic we hope will make people think.

What the owner expected of his vines was good fruit. Jesus says ‘he is the vine, we the branches to bear fruit.’ The fruit he looks for are the fruits of the Spirit that St Paul lists in Galatians: . Love/charity, Joy, Peace, Patience, Goodness, Kindness, Long-suffering, Mildness, Faith, Modesty, Self-control, Chastity.

Remember too that fruit takes time to grow. It’s not an overnight thing. Like the vine it is a lifetime of growing and producing.

There is another important aspect. Writing four years ago, the former chief Rabbi, Jonathan Sacks wrote, ‘this is not politics as usual. What we are witnessing is the birth of a new politics of **anger**. What was simmering away around the world then we have seen in different ways erupt, heightened by the pandemic. All these indicate that we are facing an unprecedented age of terror and anger.

Sack’s followed up his article with ‘After anger; there must come hope. Hope is not optimism. It begins with a candid acknowledgement on all sides of how bad things actually are.

When religion dies and consumerism takes its place, people are left with a culture that encourages them to buy things they don’t need with money they don’t have, for a happiness that won’t last. It is a bad exchange and will end in tears. All this is big, and deep and serious.

But we take heart for ‘only Jesus is the living stone, rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him: set yourselves close to him, and as the 2nd Reading says there is no need to worry, but if there is anything you need, pray for it. Pray: fill your minds with good things, and do them, and the God of peace will be with you.