27TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

OCTOBER 8,2023

ISAIAH 5:1-7

PSALM 80:9,12,13-14,15-16,19-20

PHILIPPIANS 4:6-9

MATTHEW 21:33-43

The common theme of today’s readings is the necessity of bearing fruit in the Christian life and the consequent punishment for spiritual sterility, ingratitude, and wickedness. In today’s first reading, called Isaiah’s Song of the Vineyard, the prophet describes God’s care of, and expectations for, His Chosen People. God’s Chosen People have failed to bear fruit in spite of the blessings lavished upon them by a loving and forgiving God. Further, they have been poor tenants in the Lord’s vineyard. Hence, God laments: “I expected my vineyard to yield good grapes. Why did it yield sour ones instead?” In the Responsorial Psalm (Ps 80), the Psalmist pleads with God to look down from Heaven and to “take care of this vine,” knowing that if any good is to come of the vine, it will be the doing of God, not the people. In the second reading, Paul tells Philippians about the high expectations he has for them, reminding them that they need to become fruit-producing Christians by praying and giving thanks and by practicing justice, purity, and graciousness in their lives. Giving a theological explanation of Israel’s history of gross ingratitude through a parable, Jesus, in today’s Gospel, reminds us Christians that, since we are the “new” Israel, enriched with additional blessings and provisions in the Church, we are expected to show our gratitude to God by bearing fruits of the kingdom, fruits of the Holy Spirit, in our lives, and to give God the Glory for these accomplishments.

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 to become spiritual fruit-producers 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 relating to others as loving fellow servants to our common Master. In the parable, the rent the tenants refuse to pay stands for the relationship with God and with all the people of Israel which the religious leaders refuse to cultivate. This means that before anything else, God checks on how well we are fulfilling our responsibilities to each other as children of God. The parable teaches that instead of glorying in isolated splendor, rejoicing in our privileges and Christian heritage, we are called to deeds of love, compassion, patience, generous assistance, forgiveness and mercy, for these are the witness-bearing personal and corporate actions and attitudes that invite and welcome others into God’s kingdom.

Are we good fruit-producers in the vineyard of the Church? Jesus has given the Church everything necessary to make Christians fruit-bearing: a) The Bible to know the will of God. b) The priesthood to lead the people in God’s ways. c) The Sacrament of Reconciliation for the remission of sins. d) The Holy Eucharist as our spiritual Food and Drink. e) The Sacrament of Confirmation for a dynamic life of Faith. f) The Sacrament of Matrimony for the sharing of love in families, the fundamental unit of the Church. g) The Sacrament of Anointing to restore and strengthen spiritual life and bring mental emotional and physical healing as well, if that is what God wills h) Role models in thousands of saints We are expected make use of these gifts and produce fruits for God.

Are we fruit-producers in the vineyard of the family? By the mutual sharing of blessings, by sacrificing time and talents for the members of the family, by humbly and lovingly serving others in the family, by recognizing and encouraging each other and by honoring and gracefully obeying our parents, we become producers of “good fruit” or good vines in our families and give God the Glory for these accomplishments.

Are we ready to face these hard questions? Have we come close to fulfilling God’s dream about us? What kind of grapes do we as a parish community produce? Are they sweet or sour? What is our attitude toward everything God has given to us? Are we grateful stewards for everything God has given to us, or are we like the ungrateful tenants who acted as if they owned everything God had given them? Do we practice justice every day of our lives? Do we recognize the righteousness of God that keeps us from self-righteousness? Do we remember to show mercy? Is our parish a real sign of Jesus’ presence and love? What kind of impact do we have? Do we measure the quality of our parish by what happens during Mass, or on what happens when we leave Church? Obviously, both are important but there cannot be one without the other.