

Rev. Derek Fairman

27<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time A

In the first reading from the prophet Isaiah, we hear the Vineyard Song, a song about Israel and the way in which Israel produced wild grapes rather than what the owner of the vineyard intended. The Lord did what He could to ensure that the vineyard produced the appropriate grapes, but something went wrong.

In the Gospel reading, something went terribly wrong with the vineyard, but in that parable, the problem was not so much with the produce, as it was with the tenants to whom the owner leased the land. In these instances, the fault was not with the owner of the vineyard. There was no shortage of effort and care, and yet the fruit did not quite happen.

In the Blessed Virgin Mary, the opposite is true. From desolation and renunciation, came Life Itself. The Blessed Virgin came from the house of David, or at least married into the house of David, a house that had fallen into disrepute. She renounced the pleasures of this world, devoting herself to the Lord. Her virginity was a sign of these and many other things, and yet from this lack and renunciation came an overabundance.

There are many women from the Old Testament times who foreshadowed the miraculous conception and birth of the Lord. We might remember Sarah, who was childless for a long time, but then conceived and bore Isaac. We might remember Rachel, whom Jacob loved, and yet for a long time, she was childless and looked down upon by her sister Leah. Hannah was childless for a long time, until she prayed and Samuel was given to her. These women are a few examples of those who have struggled to have children, until the Lord intervened, and the Lord brought forth children for them. Those children were to have a special calling in the Lord's plan for His people.

This theme of those women who conceived by the Lord's favor found a culmination in the Mother of God, who did not know man, and yet by the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit, conceived the Son of God in her womb. She was the Virgin who would conceive and bear a Son, as prophesied by Isaiah. In her was manifested the mystery of the Incarnation. Her renunciation allowed the Holy Spirit to work in her life.

This mystery of the Lord's birth reminds us as well of the two midwives in Egypt who ignored Pharaoh's order to let only the girls live among the Israelites. They ignored the Pharaoh's order and let the boys live too. The birth of the Virgin Mary's Son reminds us Life Itself came into our world. He came not to destroy but to bring spiritual life to all who received Him.

We all want to be fulfilled, to find the fullness of Life. In a way, the vineyard that the prophet Isaiah spoke about is the house of Israel. In the Gospel, the Lord was speaking about the vineyard as Israel too. There is a way, however, that the Lord has planted His vineyard in our hearts. The Lord has built a vineyard, so to speak, in which He planted the seeds of faith, hope, charity, and other virtues. The Lord has built a vineyard with these virtues, so that these virtues can bring us joy. Wine can symbolize joy, and that is what the Lord wants for us. He wants to bring us joy that helps us persevere amid our sorrows, a joy that no one can take from us.

The readings today remind us that to find an abundance, to find the good fruit, we must be willing to let go, to allow the Lord to do His work. There are many ways that the vineyard can go terribly wrong. The vines in the vineyard need to grow on their own, without being forced. When we try to control many things in our lives, that need for control prevents the Holy Spirit from working freely. Too much control and the desire to have everything one's own way can take away joy.

There is another way that the vineyard can go wrong. Whenever we do what we want, and do not take into consideration the needs of others, we are not serving God. We can understand that whenever we reach out to others, good things can happen, and people will be likely to respond in kindness whenever we are kind. When we focus upon what we need and want, and ignore the needs of others, people will not respond in kindness. As a result, our hearts will not be fulfilled, and our lives will not produce an abundance. To reach out to others, we must let go, we must renounce our own interests.

The vineyard can go wrong if we do not tend it. Vineyards need care and attention if they are to produce grapes at the right time and the right way. Letting the vines take care of themselves will not work. This is why it is important to listen to the voice of our conscience, to pay attention to the health of our souls, and to look within. No matter how well the seeds were planted initially, without care, the vines will wither if we do not notice the weeds around it.

As we approach the altar, we thank the Lord for His kindness to us. We thank the Lord for planting all those good virtues in us. We ask the Lord to help us tend the vineyard planted in our hearts. It is in renunciation that spiritual fruit is borne. It is the mystery of the Lord's birth, but also His rebirth in our hearts. That is how the Lord works: it is when we give up our own interests that abundance and fulfillment come to us. We pray that the Lord will bring abundance and fulfillment to our lives.