



Contributed by Father Tim Uniac, C.R.

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## TWENTY-SEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

October 5<sup>TH</sup>, 2014

GATHERING TIME (10-15 minutes)

### Introduction to the Word:

Suppose one year you decide that you are going to make your own wine. Off to the market you go to purchase the necessary grapes, having decided to use whole grapes rather than making the wine from concentrate. On your way home from market you stop at the wine-making supply store. You purchase a wine press, wine barrels, yeast, bottles, corks and a cork press, sterilizer for the bottles, a pump to draw the wine out of the barrels and fill the bottles – expensive, but you see it as a one-time expense for the years ahead of fun-filled wine-making. The next day you rise early to begin making wine. First you gently wash all the grapes by hand, trying not to bruise them. Next comes the process of pressing the grapes, and straining out the seeds and skins from the juice, all of which is physically exhausting (nothing like the *“I Love Lucy Show”* you recall from your youth). Pressing the grapes takes you some three days to complete. Then you fill the barrels with the juice, add the yeast, and the waiting begins.

Several months later, the wine is ready to be bottled. Once again the filling of the bottles is a time-consuming and tiring task, but you have done it, you have made your own wine. In celebration you contact family and friends to come over that evening to sample some of your hard work. That evening you open the first bottle, and horror of horrors, the wine has gone bad. The next bottle the same, and the next ... all of it is undrinkable. All your hard work has gone for naught. Embarrassment in front of family and friends sets in, causing you to vow that you will never make wine ever again. The following day you put all your wine-making equipment at the end of your driveway with a large sign: **“Free! Take it all, PLEASE! Try your luck.”** All your hard work, and physical expense, has produced nothing of value. In your lament you hear the words of Isaiah in our first reading: *“What more was there to do for my vineyard that I have not done in it?”*

### Warm-up Activity (about 8-10 minutes):

Do you recall ever reflecting back upon your life, or some aspect of it, and asking, like Isaiah, *What more was there to do?* Could you have done things differently, or better?

Spend some time quietly reflecting upon some aspect of your life that you would have liked to have done differently. If you could, what would you change? How does an experience like this influence your future choices or decisions?

Remember you are not the first person, nor will you be the last, to carry out this kind of reflection. Share with the group what you feel comfortable sharing.

## Table of the Word

### WINE: TO HAVE OR HAVE NOT

Ancient Israel was located along the historic wine trading route between Mesopotamia and Egypt. This would help establish wine as the principal alcoholic beverage of ancient Israel, not to mention the significance of wine for the religious rituals of the early Israelites. These factors may help explain the many references to wine in the scriptures, especially the Hebrew Scriptures (where it is mentioned more than 300 times!).

We must thank (or curse) Noah for wine: *“Noah, a man of the soil, was the first to plant a vineyard. He drank some of the wine and became drunk”* (Genesis 9:20). This behaviour would cause others to comment on the effects of wine: *“Wine and new wine take away the understanding”* (Hosea 4:11). Or *“Do not be one of those who guzzle wine, or glut themselves on meat; for guzzlers and gluttons will be impoverished, and drowsing will clothe you in tatters”* (Proverbs 23:20-21). Or *“Ah, you who rise early in the morning in pursuit of strong drink, who linger in the evening to be inflamed by wine ...”* (Isaiah 5:11). However, the Scriptures also reveal the blessings that wine can bring, from wine being identified as coming from one of the seven blessed fruits (Deuteronomy 8:8), to wine that can *“gladden the heart”* (Psalm 104:15), or being told to go and *“drink your wine with a merry heart”* (Ecclesiastes 9:7).

What are your thoughts concerning the consumption of wine? Are the Scriptures for, against or indifferent to, the drinking of wine?

**Leader:** O Lord, you call us to care for the vine which you have planted.

**Lord Jesus,** help us to respond with open hearts to the prophets you send, **Lord, have mercy.**

**Christ Jesus,** help us to recognize you as the only Son of God, **Christ, have mercy.**

**Lord Jesus,** help us to bear fruit that will nourish and sustain us, **Lord, have mercy.**

### Let us pray

(Together)

Lord God,

*you show your almighty power in your mercy and forgiveness.*

*Continue to fill us with your gifts of love.*

*Help us to hurry toward the eternal life you promise  
and come to share in the joys of your kingdom.*

*Grant this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,  
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

### SCRIPTURE REFLECTION TIME (45 minutes)

*(As Christians we believe that the **WORD** of God we hear proclaimed each Sunday is an empowering Word, and that God is present in the Word proclaimed. This is the Word that God wants us to hear today. The dynamic of the Small Christian Community, namely, reflecting on our life story within the context of this Word, and sharing the insights of these reflections, is such that God's Spirit becomes present, and the gifts of the Spirit are experienced as empowering and life giving.)*

**FIRST READING** (Isaiah 5:1–7)

Let me sing for my beloved my love song concerning his vineyard: “My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. He dug it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines; he built a watchtower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it; he expected it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes.

“And now, inhabitants of Jerusalem and people of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. What more was there to do for my vineyard that I have not done in it? When I expected it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes?

“And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured; I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down. I will make it a waste; it shall not be pruned or hoed, and it shall be overgrown with briars and thorns; I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it. For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the people of Judah are his pleasant planting; he expected justice, but saw bloodshed; righteousness, but heard a cry!”

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

**SECOND READING** (Philippians 4:6–9)

Brothers and sisters: Do not worry about anything, but in everything let your requests be made known to God by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

**GOSPEL** (Matthew 21:33–43)

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew. **Glory to you, O Lord.**

Jesus said to the chief priests and the elders of the people: “Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a watchtower. Then he leased it to tenants and went to another country.

“When the harvest time had come, he sent his slaves to the tenants to collect his produce. But the tenants seized his slaves and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. Again he sent other slaves, more than the first; and they treated them in the same way.

“Finally he sent his son to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, ‘This is the heir; come, let us kill him and get his inheritance.’ So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him.

“Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?” They said to him, “He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the harvest time.”

Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures; ‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord’s doing, and it is amazing in our eyes’? “ Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom.”

The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

*(Allow two minutes for quiet and for a brief reflection  
on a meaningful word or thought)*

## COMMENTARY:

The Prophet Isaiah, son of Amoz, is considered by many to be the greatest of the Old Testament prophets, owing to the amazing range and vision of his prophecies. His ministry was primarily in the Kingdom of Judah, from the city of Jerusalem southward, although most of his ministry seems to have taken place in the city of Jerusalem itself between 740 – 700 BCE. This largest of prophetic books extends over a number of centuries, leading scholars to conclude that only the first thirty-nine chapters out of sixty-six (what scholars refer to as First Isaiah) contain the direct testimony of Isaiah himself. From his writings we know that Isaiah was involved in the politics of his day, he seemed to have had direct access to kings, and he appears to have come from some sort of noble family (however, some scholars argue that the “nobility” of Isaiah may be more a recognition of respect he had achieved for his faithfulness to the call of God). The primary theological concern of Isaiah was his demand that the people of Israel place their trust in God alone, the **“Holy One of Israel”**, and not in some foreign power such as the Assyrians (Isaiah refers to Assyria as the instrument of God’s punishment 10:5-15). This is the context of today’s first reading.

Today's reading, the **“Song of the Vineyard”**, is described by scholars as a poem, or perhaps better still, a ballad that Isaiah would have sung: **“Let me sing for my beloved”** (5:1a). The song begins with some rather pleasant and happy notes as it describes the **“fertile hill”** (5:1b), how the stones were cleared in anticipation of the planting, the planting of **“choice vines”** (5:2a), the building of a watchtower and wine vat – all in expectation that it would **“yield grapes”** (5:2b). But alas, **“it yielded wild grapes”** (5:2b), unfit for human consumption. To all of this Isaiah poses the question, **“what more was there to do?”** (5:4a). What is this prophecy by Isaiah attempting to communicate to the people of Judah? The **“beloved”** (5:1b), to whom Isaiah is singing, are the people of Judah, who are metaphorically the **“choice vines”** (5:2a). The people of Judah are seen as the **“pleasant planting”** (5:7a) of the grape farmer. The farmer, who is initially referred to as **“he”** (5:2a), is ultimately identified as the **“Lord of hosts”** (5:7a) – God. The land, vineyard, is the **“house of Israel”** (5:7a). The prophecy is intended to remind the people that God lovingly prepared the field, the house of Israel, and that God protected what was planted with a watchtower. However, after all this work, nothing of value was produced, God is disappointed with the house of Israel and their poor reception of what was planted within them. God expected **“justice”** (5:7b) but only saw **“bloodshed”** (5:7b); God expected **“righteousness”** (5:7b) and only **“heard a cry”** (5:7b). In the verses that follow (not included in today's reading) the prophecy will reveal the possible consequences for the house of Israel because of their poor response for all that God has done for them – for their becoming nothing more than **“wild grapes”** (5:2b), good for nothing. This parable serves as a warning to the people of Judah, mend your ways or else the instrument of God's punishment, the Assyrians (10:5-15) will destroy them. A challenging message indeed.

Philippians is one of the seven Pauline letters actually written by Paul himself. Scholars believe it was written while Paul was imprisoned in Ephesus (2 Cor. 1:8-10). Paul found himself under a sentence of death, not knowing if he would live or die, and clearly this situation has a profound impact on Paul's writing (see Phil. 1:20-23). While facing possible death Paul is not so much concerned with himself; he is more concerned with the people of Philippi. Paul calls them to continue to spread the Gospel and to grow in Christ; this message permeates much of this letter. Where does Paul gain this sort of strength while facing possible death? We see throughout Paul's letters that this strength is rooted in his experience of God, who so intimately touched his life, and his profound belief that the death and resurrection of Jesus changed everything. With this inner spirit, Paul exhorts the people of Philippi to **“not worry about anything”** (Phil. 4:6). Paul calls them to pray in thanksgiving for all that God has bestowed upon them and the **“peace of God”** (Phil. 4:7) will be their reward. This peace from God, and the serenity of life that accompanies it, will allow the Philippians to faithfully live lives that are marked by truth, honour, justice and purity, lives that are pleasing and commendable (Phil. 4:8) – for all these things offer praise to God. Paul's beautiful exhortation to live in such a manner comes from a man facing possible death. Paul's last thoughts are not concerning the pain and suffering he might need to endure, but rather, his last thoughts and concerns are for the people of Philippi. Paul's hope is that they might experience the **“peace of God”** (Phil. 4:9), the very same peace he has come to know in his own life.

The Gospel today introduces us to an absentee landlord, the owner of the vineyard. In first-century Israel, this form of governance over one's property was very common, so people would be able to easily relate to its use in the vineyard parable by Jesus. Owners would lease their land to sharecroppers, who in exchange for working the farm would receive a percentage of the profits at harvest time. Hearers of this parable would no doubt have reacted very strongly, and perhaps negatively, to the attempt by the tenants (sharecroppers) to take over ownership of the property – knowing full well that to take over the vineyard while the owner was still alive was very much illegal. Listeners would also have been mystified by the notion that killing the son, while the owner was still alive, would bring about a legal change in ownership of the vineyard, again not possible. At this point in the telling of the parable the listeners must have asked: *what exactly is the point of this parable, what is Jesus trying to communicate?* Let us attempt to discover.

The Gospel passage begins by making clear who Jesus is addressing: *“the chief priests and the elders of the people”* (21:33). This parable of the vineyard, which immediately follows the parable of the two sons which is also directly addressed to the priests and elders, serves as a warning to them that the kingdom of God may be taken away from them (21:43). What have they done to justify this warning? To answer this we need to identify the characters in the parable and discover what the unfolding story is saying. The owner of the vineyard clearly is God. The two groups of servants sent to collect the produce represent the prophets. We know they are prophets due to the reference to stoning them – a common way in which prophets were executed. The owner's son is Jesus. And the tenants are the leaders of the people. As the parable unfolds the owner's son is seized, thrown from the vineyard and killed by the tenants. Following this the owner returns, more than a little upset by what has happened, proclaiming that the kingdom will be taken from the tenants. God sent prophets into the vineyard, whose message pointed to the future coming of the Messiah, some of whom were rejected and executed by stoning. God then sends his only Son into the vineyard, who is also rejected and executed by those appointed to care for the vineyard (which symbolizes the people of God). Their leadership is left wanting, thus new tenants (leaders) will be appointed in their place to care for the vineyard (people of God). Just as in Isaiah, this parable serves as a warning: change and mend your ways or undesirable consequences may result. A challenge not to be ignored.

(Allow about 5 – 10 minutes for the participants to react to the **Commentary** to identify a newly discovered insight or idea.)

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION:

### **Isaiah 5:1-7** *“Let me sing for my beloved my song concerning his vineyard.”*

- ^ Isaiah sings this wonderful ballad, love song, that recalls how lovingly and gently God prepared the fields, planted the vines, and cared for them. God truly does love us! Recall times in your life when you have experienced God's love flowing over you, how did you feel? Did this experience change you in any way?
- ^ Imagine the frustration God must have experienced watching the work that went into planting the vineyard producing only *“wild grapes”*. Isaiah asks as a result of this *“Why did it yield wild grapes?”* What do you think?

### **Philippians 4:6-9** *“The God of peace will be with you”*

- ^ Paul reveals an incredible spiritual strength on his part, placing the fear of his own possible death aside so that he could encourage the people of Philippi. How does this example by Paul make you feel? Have you ever experienced a loved one, or friend nearing death, who placed the needs of others before their own needs – the dying actually ministering to those who are grieving? How did this impact your life?

- ▲ Paul exhorts the people of Philippi to **“not worry about anything”**. As you hear Paul address this exhortation to **you**, what worries would he ask you to not fret about? What, if anything, do you need to do in order to experience the peace of God that comes with placing your worries aside?

**Matthew 21:33-43** **“The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone”**

- ▲ The servants in today’s Gospel, who represent the prophets of God, were often rejected for what they said, and sometimes executed by stoning. Why do you think people had such a difficult time accepting the prophets and their message?
- ▲ Jesus concludes that the leaders of his day were not properly caring for the vineyard (the people of God), and therefore should be replaced. Do you think Jesus would say the same thing today about religious leaders? Why or why not?

**CARING-PRAYING TIME:** (15--20 minutes)

*(This time is reserved for quiet prayer as well as for an action-response to the communal reflections. The intent is to 'outreach' to the larger community. The facilitator should allow for a moderate pause between each of the numbered suggestions for reflection and action.)*

**Word for the Week:**

***“What more was there to do for my vineyard that I have not done in it?”***

**Suggestion for the Week:**

Two possible suggestions. One, for those who enjoy wine, call a friend who you have not spent quality time with for a long time and invite them over for a glass of wine. Follow the exhortation of Ecclesiastes (9:7): **“Drink your wine with a merry heart”**. Use this time to renew your bond and share your love for one another. Two, autumn is a wonderful time to visit a winery, not so much to drink the harvest, although that can be enjoyable, but to see the fields of grapes. Recall the words of Isaiah as you view the fields that have been lovingly cared for, planted in fertile land, the fields cleared of stones, the choicest of vines growing – just like the vineyard God has planted.

**Intercessions:** (Response: **Lord, hear our prayer**)

**Leader:** We are reminded by Paul that the peace of God, which surpasses all our understanding, will guard our minds and hearts in Jesus. Our faith in Jesus will bring us peace and serenity, and so we pray ...

**For the Lord's vineyard.** May we, the people of God, who form the vineyard of the Lord, respond to God's call in our life so that an abundance of good grapes may be produced, we pray to the Lord ...

**For religious leaders.** For the graces of God to touch their lives so that their care for the vineyard of the Lord will help produce an abundant harvest, we pray to the Lord ...

**For farmers.** May those who dedicate their lives to providing the world with food be blessed for their labours, and be rewarded with an abundant harvest of God's love upon them, we pray to the Lord ...

**For those who seek peace.** May those who hunger for peace in their lives find strength in the words of Paul to the people of Philippi – to place their worries and cares into the hands of God and thus experience the peace and serenity of God, we pray to the Lord ...

**For all people of faith.** May all who endeavour to live a life of faith always strive to live lives that are truthful, honourable, just, pure, and pleasing to God, we pray to the Lord ...

**For strength to overcome fear.** For ourselves, that we may never shy away from or fear challenging messages, such as those found in Isaiah and Matthew today, but rather seek the strength and guidance of God to respond with openness and trust, we pray to the Lord ...

**For all nations.** For all nations of the world as they interact with one another, may they always seek justice rather than bloodshed, and righteousness rather than a cry, we pray to the Lord ...

**For the deceased.** For all those who have gone before us in faith, especially those who were most near and dear to us, may they come to enjoy the abundant harvest and drink the choicest of wines in the kingdom of heaven, we pray to the Lord ...

### **How can we help you in prayer this week?**

#### **Let us pray**

(together)

*Almighty and eternal God,*

*Creator of all that is,*

*your goodness is beyond what our spirit can touch  
and your strength is more than the mind can bear.*

*Lead us to seek beyond our reach  
and give us the courage to stand before your truth.*

*We ask this through Christ or Lord. Amen.*

**With hands and hearts united in gratitude for God's favors on us today, we pray that all those in our influence be moved to be open to your Word and your Spirit, while we pray as one, OUR FATHER ...**

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The Scripture version used in this commentary is the [New Revised Standard Version](#) (copyrighted by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA).