

HOMILY SUNDAY 27-A (Homily 02)
“Walking the Talk in the Kingdom of Jesus”
(Isaiah 5:1-7; Psalm 80; Philippians 4:6-9; Matthew 21:33-43)

The Kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to those who will produce the fruit of the Kingdom.

That quote from Jesus in today’s Gospel is a wake-up call inviting us to live in the Kingdom of God and produce the fruit of the Kingdom.

In the first reading from the prophet Isaiah, the vineyard is a symbol of the Kingdom of God, the new world order that God wants to bring about here on earth. God’s tender loving care for that vineyard is gently described. God has provided fertile ground, chosen choice vines, prepared the ground, hewed out a vat, fenced the vineyard in to protect it and watered it. Like a dedicated gardener, everything was done to assure a productive vineyard. This vineyard thus symbolizes God’s love for God’s people and God’s desire for an intimate relationship with and loving response from that people.

Instead, history shows that the response was constant and disappointing infidelity and betrayal of the covenant by Israel. The fruit that vineyard bore was sin, self-will, pride, arrogance, control, injustice, abuse of power and hypocrisy. Centuries later Jesus would add to that list the especially grievous sin of unbelief in him, the refusal of the Jewish authorities to believe that he was sent by God, that he was the son of God. We could ask ourselves at this point, how are we responding today to God’s love? What would the prophet Isaiah write about us?

In the Gospel from Matthew, we know that Jesus came to inaugurate the kingdom of God in a new way. It would be the kingdom of Jesus, with his stamp on it. However, Jesus runs into the same resistance that the Father did with the Old Testament Israelites. The parable Jesus shares is essentially the same parable as that of Isaiah, with a different nuance. Jesus focuses not on the produce of the vineyard but on the behaviour of the tenants towards the prophets and eventually towards Jesus himself as the Son. This powerful parable, addressed to the religious leaders, pulls the truth of Isaiah, the rejection of God’s loving, generous initiative, into Jesus’ own time.

The parable that Jesus skilfully recounts elicits a condemnatory response from the religious leaders themselves who ironically *don’t get it*. They fail to see that they

are the subject of the parable, that they are condemning themselves by their response to the parable. Jesus puts it plainly at the end - they are the guilty ones. The kingdom will be taken from them and given to those who will produce the fruit of that kingdom. It is all about the kingdom of God in the end.

Paul, for his part, exhorts his followers to be different from the Israelites of the Old Testament, and the religious leaders that Jesus faced. He wants his faithful to be the new people of God. Paul is living this new way so earnestly himself that he can boldly ask them to follow his example, to live in that reign of Jesus the way he himself is living it. What confidence we see in Paul, and what exemplary leadership! Paul walks the talk, and is responding to God's call in a way that would warm the heart of Isaiah, as surely it did the heart of Jesus. Would that we could do the same.

Someone who is very much like Paul, who is walking the talk and responding to the call of Jesus to live in his kingdom, is Jean Vanier, founder of the L'Arche movement. In his latest booklet, entitled *The Scandal of Service*, Vanier eloquently describes how the members of the community he founded seek the lowest place, strive to live an authority from below, find Jesus hidden in the poor and the marginalized. He writes eloquently how Jesus lowered himself to wash the feet of his disciples as a sign that he wants, above all, a close, intimate relationship with them of love and compassion, not power and control. He is living out the dynamics of this revolutionary new kingdom of God among us.

The Eucharist that we celebrate today is a humble meal that is central to the theology of this new reign of God. Jesus, who is hidden in the lowly and the poor, can be found also in the humble gifts of bread and wine.

We who celebrate this sacrament, this banquet of the kingdom, are invited to have faith in Jesus, to live in the reign of Jesus and walk the talk, to bear the fruit of that kingdom which is faith, hope and compassionate love for all.

