

# 27<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Year

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In the Scriptures wine is seen not so much as a basic necessity as a sign of joy. Isaiah speaks of the heavenly banquet involving fine strained wines. At the Last Supper Jesus speaks of the new wine of the Kingdom – he will not be drinking any more earthly wine. The people of Israel had drunk wine from the late Bronze Age – about the time they entered the Promised Land from Egypt. In earlier times only date wine was known in the Middle East. In fact the Hebrew word for wine is a loan word derived from the same Indo-European root as vinum/oinos/wine. Wild grapes are not native to the Holy Land. Cultivation of the grape was introduced from outside.

The Psalm reflects an awareness of this – like the vine itself the people of Israel had come from outside. Just cultivation of the vine had spread across the Northern Hills to the Mediterranean, and just as the vines spread long the ground, so God's people had spread throughout the land and conquered it. If this was God's will, why were they now under attack – why did God not protect them? In our first reading Isaiah develops this theme. The vine grows in vineyard God has carefully prepared. Archaeology shows the accuracy of his description. The vineyard needed to be protected from wild animals by a wall or hedges – the vines trailed along the ground like strawberries until the Romans introduced the idea of raising the on trellises. In the middle you find a wide, shallow area about 15" deep, cut out of the rock to tread the wine – a wooden press in the centre to extract the residue – with channels leading in a small, deeper wine vat – about 4' deep for the first fermentation before the wine is drawn off into unsealed jars or skins for the completion of the fermentation process. God goes to all this trouble because the vine does not exist for its own sake but to produce fruit that will give joy to his heart – the fruit of justice and integrity.

Jesus gives this image a new twist. This time it is the tenants who seek to deprive the owner of his produce and keep it for themselves. It is a dig at the religious and political leadership of his own day who have rejected the message of the prophets and put John the Baptist to death. Now he speaks of himself foreseeing the Passion. He will be taken out of the vineyard that is Jerusalem and crucified on the hill of Calvary. It is a warning and promise – a warning to the authorities and a promise to his followers. They will be the people to whom God will entrust the vineyard in future. They will be the branches of the new vine – Christ himself. We are that people but God's expectation is the same. He wants us to produce fruit that will fill him with joy.

Justice and peace, holiness of life, are brought about and protected by the way we live our every day lives. St. Paul pleads with the Philippians, "Fill your minds with everything that is true, everything that is noble, everything that is good and pure, everything that we love and honour, and everything that can be thought virtuous or worthy of praise."

There is always a danger that our lives become compartmentalised. There is our place of work, and then there is quality time with family and friends, an expression that implies a third of our day is not quality time, a necessity rather than an opportunity. We can likewise separate out religion for Sundays, or times of prayer, or as something that governs only personal morality. We can lose sight of who we are - a whole person who works, loves, enjoys the world that God has given, lives a life of faith and prayer. St. Paul is telling us that our lives need to be integrated, not broken up into compartments. Our faith and the values that Christ taught us must influence the whole of our life. Only then will we produce the fruit the Lord is looking for.

We must value highly human virtues such as professional competence, family and civic sense, honesty, sense of justice, sincerity, courtesy, and moral courage. These are the foundations of the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity. Without them our faith will be too spiritual and disconnected from everyday life. A bloodless, anaemic Christianity will produce only sour grapes, in our own lives, and in the world around us. Our faith and our religion should not be empty or colourless, but full of everything that is good and holy, noble and pure, full of life and colour. It is this that will make the vineyard fruitful.