

## Twenty-Seventh Sunday In Ordinary Time – 10/8/17

My dear people of God:

As we celebrate the twenty-seventh Sunday of the Ordinary Time, we will recommit ourselves to the Lord Jesus Christ, who is truly the Son of God. WE WILL CHOOSE HIM. It would certainly be helpful to recall the words of C.S. Lewis: *“He was Divine. ... Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse”*.

In particular, the prophecy from Isaiah, the Responsorial Psalm, and the Gospel all use the image of a promising vineyard to express their meaning. In a sense, going beyond the agricultural imagery, the theme of these readings is that of *choosing*. In Isaiah’s famous *“song of the vineyard”* the prophet describes how the Lord, having chosen His land, carefully cleared it, tilled it, and planted it with only the finest vines, yet it yielded nothing but bitter wild grapes.

The prophet then makes it clear that the vineyard represents the Lord’s chosen people Israel, and that He will punish this vineyard by uprooting it: *“The vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the people of Judah are his cherished plant; he looked for judgment, but see, bloodshed! for justice, but hark, the outcry!”* (Isaiah 5:7).

The theme of choosing continues in the Responsorial Psalm, where the Psalmist recalls the exodus of the Chosen Israelites from Egypt and their entry into the Promised Land: *“A vine from Egypt you transplanted; you drove away the nations and planted it”* (Psalm 80:9).

But there is a plea for restoration: *“Give us new life, and we will call upon your name. O Lord, God of hosts, restore us”* (Psalm 80:19-20).

From our second reading, we heard from St. Paul telling us how to stop worrying and start living. Today, St. Paul tells us, "*Have no anxiety at all.*" (Phil 4:6) We perhaps smile with disbelief at those words. When someone says not to worry, it can sound like bad things can never happen. But we know that bad things can happen and they continue to happen. The extra judicial killings(EJK) in the Philippines have gone beyond three thousand deaths. The hurricanes Harvey, Irma, Jose and Maria crushed lives and properties. Texas, Florida, the US Virgin Islands and the Carribean suffered a lot. Puerto Rico is in despair. The earthquakes in Mexico claimed several lives, and the survivors are suffering. And just a few nights ago, more than 58 people died and more than 500 were wounded in the shooting in a concert in Las Vegas. How can Paul tell us not to worry?

Brothers and sisters, it would be beneficial for us to know that Paul himself faced trials which few of us could conceive. He had experienced public whipping, shipwrecks, snake bites, imprisonment and bodily ailments.

Yet in this letter, written toward the end of his life, he says, "*Have no anxiety at all.*" In his admonition to cast aside worry, St. Paul was echoing Jesus. Paul understood profoundly that Jesus, at the Last Supper, knowing fully well that the next morning He would face public humiliation and unspeakable tortures, Jesus told His disciples, "*Do not let your hearts be troubled.*" We can ask how it is possible to obey such a command. And let's be clear. Paul and Jesus are not making a pious suggestion; they are giving a command. Have no anxiety at all. Do not let your hearts be troubled. All of us must choose to be free from worries.

When Paul says to have no anxieties, when Jesus tells us not to be troubled, it does not mean to ignore reality. What it means is that we take a different approach to our troubles.

Jesus said, "*Do not worry about tomorrow. Tomorrow will take care of itself. Sufficient for a day is its own evil.*" (Matthew 6:34) That does not mean that we do not make prudent plans. Careful preparation is part of today's duty.

But once we make those plans, put them in Jesus' hands. God will take care of us. Those are good words. Now is the moment to say a prayer of abandonment. What a difference it would make if we could place our cares in God's hand. St. Paul tells us to stop worrying and start living. Have no anxieties at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving. Let us make our requests known to God. Then the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Now to the gospel:

Very often farms and vineyards were owned by foreigners or by wealthy Israelites who lived a great distance away, usually in foreign countries.

Basing Himself on Isaiah 5, which was our first reading, Jesus tells the people that the vineyard is the people of Israel. The vineyard in Isaiah 5 is cut down because the people of Israel have not been faithful to their God. The vineyard in the parable from the Gospel of Matthew is a source of turmoil because the workmen have been keeping the fruit for themselves. The workmen here are the *chief priests, elders and religious leaders* of the Jewish people. They were more concerned with themselves than with the work of God's kingdom. Jesus came at a very inopportune time for the Jewish leaders. Politically, these leaders were winning concessions from Rome that would keep them in power. Financially, the leaders of the people were afraid that they would be thrown into poverty if they lost their position. To the leaders of the Jewish people, this was not a good time for a Messiah. But the world was waiting. God was ready. The timing was really perfect.

The chief priests and the elders could hardly have doubted that Jesus was referring Isaiah's words to them, for His words follow closely upon the "*song of the vineyard*," which they would likely have known by heart. Again we hear how a landowner selected a plot, carefully prepared and planted it, and then leased it out to tenants whom he expected to look after his vineyard and help it bear a good harvest. Being badly scorned by them and seeing his servants beaten and killed he then sends his beloved son, who is likewise killed—an unmistakable reference to Christ Himself and to His violent death.

The parable concludes with the warning that the landowner will come back and "put those wretched men to a wretched death and lease his vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the proper times." Here we see an allusion to the general lack of reception that Jesus found from His own people.

But God is not to be trifled with. The Parable of the Tenants tells us what Jesus thought about Himself. The agents who preceded Him were the prophets. For there is only one Son. He is the Christ. Do we see now it is not enough to say the Nazarene was a great man? One *must choose* whether He is divine or a madman or something worse.

This parable contains one of the clearest claims Jesus ever made to being the awaited Messiah, who will give direction and meaning to our existence. He considers Himself way above the greatest prophet. WE WILL CHOOSE HIM. AMEN