

## Fr James' homily for the Twenty-Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: Isaiah 5:1-7  
Second Reading: Philippians 4:6-9  
Gospel: Matthew 21:33-43



### The demands of love

During the year, especially at the key times of year in Advent, Lent, Christmas and Easter, we read in church from the prophet Isaiah maybe more often than any other prophet. We read Isaiah today. ***“Let me sing to my friend the song of his love for his vineyard”***. In other words, Isaiah tells us he gives voice to the voice of God. So often he is telling us of the coming of Christ (Advent) and the meaning of Christ (Lent). It is undoubtedly with these words of Isaiah in mind that the Lord Jesus uses the image of the vineyard too, in the Gospel, to urge us to respond to God.

The vineyard is above all else in Scripture an image of the People of Israel, God's chosen people. So the song is of the love of God for his people. Note all the care that the creator takes: he digs; he clears away stones-this is lots of hard work. Then he plants the best vines and provides all facilities.... and then he expects much of his people.

But what he finds is sour grapes, for Israel has not done its part. God's grace needs a response always. When we contemplate the love of God the creator we should cultivate (excuse the agricultural pun) more and more a sense that something is demanded of us. For indeed the scriptures are also about us: we, the Church, are the New Israel, as St Paul constantly says. And again, the tradition of the Church always identifies the vineyard with each individual soul as well as with the whole people.

The drama of salvation, the story of God's loving purpose and how it is made visible in Jesus, is painfully explained in the Gospel parable. So in this, as you read it, see the story of all history - but also and most importantly see YOUR particular story also...the story of how each of us responds and doesn't respond to God's demands.

For this song of love continues today. In our reverent and purposeful use of all the sacraments; in our attentiveness to the teaching of our faith and the call to conversion of life; in the life of the Church and the witness and communion of all the saints - all of this too is about God clearing the stones and digging the soil and planting the best in each soul.

Jesus tells us clearly in all his teaching, and so clearly in this Gospel parable, that something big is at stake in our lives. We should not be casual about our life. Certainly we know that God's plan is to save all his creation and we hope for that in all souls. But it is not a done deal. Our Lady at Fatima constantly reminds us, for example, of the need for us to respond to God's grace, for ourselves and for those who haven't!

What Isaiah is telling us too, and the Gospel in a stark way, is that where we don't cooperate with God's grace, where we don't take on the demands of his love, things will fall apart. This is not God being vengeful or vindictive, it is the consequence of our choices and actions. Our identity is damaged.

St Paul speaks today with serene confidence: "***There is no need to worry...***" Not easy words to hear or take seriously right now, or indeed any time. But truly important words. God is always the loving creator, the friend, the one who purposes good. Ally ourselves to that and, no matter how hard the work sometimes is, we will be close to his kingdom.

Amen.

*Fr James and Fr Tom wish you a blessed Sunday. Keep safe and well, and never hesitate to pick up the telephone and be in touch. See you in church I hope! Keep in close contact with the website for news of how practical plans are developing.*