

27th Sunday of Ordinary Time
October 7 & 8, 2017

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Imagine in your mind's eye the most beautiful place you've ever been. For many people of the earth, both home and the most beautiful place they have ever been are one and the same. For many people of the earth, both have been destroyed by humans or nature.

The vineyard, featured in today's Gospel is a place of beauty and a resource for the family. It represents Earth and its resources. God did not draw lines on this beautiful earth in order to parcel it out by sections to various owners. Our astronauts did not see property lines around countries and states. The Earth is meant to be a gift to everyone which requires good stewardship that it might give life to all who live on it.

Earlier this year I visited the beautiful vineyards along Seneca Lake. Most have lovely lodges, tasting rooms and stores owned by the landowners who are somehow usually involved in the operations. But in Jesus' time, the agrarian population had only two classes, the very wealthy land owner and the poor laborers. Jesus shocks his hearers because in His story the landowner's son actually came himself to rectify the injustices committed by the laborers.

In this parable, Jesus is predicting what will happen to Himself, and what happened to the many prophets before him, that at the hands of those whose power, greed, and positions were threatened, there would be death. The story is a commentary on our lives today. The Spirit dwells within us, within creation and yet, greed, power, wealth, control threaten the vineyard and attempts are made to extinguish those who try to set things right. This terribly sad story ends with: "The Kingdom of God will be taken away from you (the unjust) and given to a people that will produce its fruit," Its fruit ...the Kingdom of God's fruit. Its people...the fruit producing people.

Each of us is given the grace to turn our lives toward the Light that produces good fruit. My friend Mitch is an inmate at a high security prison in Pennsylvania has been exchanging letters with me for years. He is trying to produce good fruit in his life by direct care to dying prisoners in their hospice unit. He is also trying to go upstream by decrying through letters the ineffectiveness of the "mercy clemency" or medical discharge from prison because very few prisoners ever

receive it, even if bedridden and family is begging because of bureaucratic red tape which takes away any chance of mercy. He is trying to produce good fruit.

The tenants in today's story forgot who they were. As servants they were to collaborate with the owner of the vineyard. Instead, they desired to be the sole masters of the vineyard, eliminating anyone who got in their way.

In *Laudato Si, on Care for our Common Home*, Pope Francis writes: "We have come to see ourselves as Earth's lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will. The violence present in our hearts is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life."

The violence in our hearts is also reflected in the way that we exclude one another, mistreat one another, and fail to see our connectedness. Chair of USCCB on Migration, Bishop Joe Vasquez of Austin, Texas: "We are disturbed and deeply disappointed by the proposed Presidential Determination number of 45,000 for the upcoming fiscal year. While the Catholic Bishops, Catholic Charities, and Catholic communities across the country join in welcoming all of those refugees to American communities with joy and open arms, we are gravely concerned for the tens of thousands of extremely vulnerable refugees left behind by this decision."

Pope Francis on September 27th kicked-off a campaign to raise awareness of the plight of migrants and refugees worldwide. This week is the week of prayer that our hearts may be open to pray and act on behalf of those needing safe homes.

St. Paul gives us a recommendation to live by when he writes to the Philippians: "Live according to what you have seen and heard." The Spirit of Jesus walks with us to guide us as we farm this vineyard, produce fruits of mercy, forgiveness, generosity, openness, patience, joy, understanding and peace.

Our Earth, our earth community, our brothers and sisters in need, this is who we pray for this week...let us now pray as we join thousands of others in this week of prayer: (pray the prayer in pews)