

27th Sunday

The story of Israel is told and re-told using a variety of literary devices. The story is quite simple, closely resembling the story of our own lives, but the variety of literary devices and images give it added meaning and provide a mirror for Israel to see herself from a variety of different perspectives.

Jesus' re-telling of Israel's story, in today's Gospel, is not unique. Nor is Jesus' criticism of the chief priests and elders. Speaking truth to power is front and centre in prophetic literature. So, too, the hope that some will heed God's Word and change their ways.

The parable begins with a beautiful vineyard, an ancient image of the land of Israel, where God decided to settle his people. Notice how God set up protective walls, clear boundaries, geographic defences; God's providential protection and guidance plays a pivotal role in Israel's understanding of herself and her history.

But Israel lost her way, not just once, but on several occasions (as peoples and individuals do from time to time). They had failed to acknowledge God, especially in times of prosperity, and usurped their position, pursued their own self-interest and withheld what was due to God and others.

It's the prophet's role to remind, to turn the hearts of the people back to the Lord. In so doing, the prophet does not act out of self-interest, but on behalf of the one he/she is called to serve. The role of the prophet is, by its very nature, a thankless one, filled with dangers and pitfalls. His/Her only consolation and hope comes, not from success, but from the relationship he/she has with God.

The parable of the vineyard can be applied to our own failure as tenants. Rather than showing concern for that which has been entrusted to us, and responding to God's call to share the abundance of the harvest with those in need, we show signs of greed and exploitation and forget our obligations to those who are last and least. On this memorial of St. Francis of Assisi and the conclusion of the Church's month-long focus on creation, it is good to remember the prophetic words of Pope Francis in his encyclical on creation, and take up his call to be motivated by love of neighbour rather than love of self, love of creation rather than the exploitation of all that is entrusted to our care.

Like the tenants in today's parable, our first reaction to correction is not good. We would rather ridicule the message, do away with the messengers, take God out of the picture and take possession of the vineyard ourselves, rejecting any notion of accountability.

"What will the owner do with those tenants?" The question continues to resonate throughout the ages. Though the chief priests and elders are quick to condemn ("He will put those wretches to a miserable death."), God's answer in sending his Son, and allowing him to be crucified at our hands, points to a greater reason for hope. In holding the mirror before us, God shows us our shortcomings, without failing to highlight his mercy.

God is looking for the fruit of our labour, a fruit born from love, service, generosity, forgiveness and self-sacrifice, a fruit not unlike the gift of His Son. "Surely they will respect my Son," God tells us in today's parable. May the fruit He bore for us, bear fruit in our lives, now and always.

note: please check out our "Family Connections" resource found on our webpage ([www.rcchurch.com](http://www.rcchurch.com)). Included in this week's edition: a short blessing of the family pet(s).