

Twenty-seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time
October 8, 2017

Anxiety. It's a normal part of life to experience occasional anxiety. We worry about paying bills, landing a job, and other important life events. Anxiety may be caused by embarrassment or self-consciousness in uncomfortable or awkward situations. Some of us develop a case of nerves before a big test, business presentation, performance, or other significant event. Everyday anxiety occurs when we face realistic fears of dangerous objects, places, and situations. And we certainly experience anxiety immediately after a traumatic event.

Today's readings make me wonder if God has ever felt any kind of anxiety with His people. In my mind, He certainly must have been frustrated. The message that comes through in today's readings is a clear message of rejection from God's people.

In our first reading today, Isaiah 5:1-7, we hear a parable about the owner of a vineyard who did everything he could to produce a good crop. He chose a "fertile hillside; he spaded it, cleared it of stones, and planted the choicest vines; within it he built a watchtower, and hewed out a wine press." Yet in the end, the vineyard still produced only wild grapes. The farmer did everything possible but still was unable to produce a healthy crop. In the Gospel reading, Matthew 21:33-43, we hear another parable about a landowner who planted a vineyard. In this story, the landowner also did everything he could to bring about a successful harvest including hiring tenants to take care of the vineyard. When vintage time drew near, the landowner sent servants and even his own son to obtain his produce but instead the tenants beat and even killed those that were sent by the landowner.

God is our landowner. He gives constant love and grace yet still there are those that turn away from him. Each time God sent a prophet, whether it was Noah, Moses, David, or Isaiah, the prophet and his message are rejected by God's people. But God never gives up. He sent His Son as the most loving offer of all and yet He was still rejected. To my human mind this is frustrating and would lead me to feeling anxious. But in Isaiah 55: 8-9, we learn "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, my thoughts higher than your thoughts." God grants continuous mercy and love even in the face of infidelity and rejection from His people.

God's plan is to bring us into His family so we'll bear good fruit. He blessed us with free will and does not force a positive response on us. But when we reject God, we must live in the conditions which fit our desires for such actions. In the Gospel, Jesus questions the chief priests and elders about Psalm 118: 22-23 "The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. By the Lord has this been done; it is wonderful in our eyes." He wants us to know that God invites us to be good people who do what is right and who accept Jesus, the Son of God.

As for our earthly anxieties, God has an answer in Philippians 4: 6-7 "Have not anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God. Then the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."

God has sent us an invitation. Let us answer with a positive response.

“Lord, make us to walk in your way: Where there is love and wisdom, there is neither fear nor ignorance; where there is patience and humility, there is neither anger nor annoyance; where there is poverty and joy, there is neither greed nor avarice; where there is peace and contemplation, there is neither care nor restlessness; where there is the fear of God to guard the dwelling, there no enemy can enter; where there is mercy and prudence, there is neither excess nor harshness; this we know through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.” (Prayer of Francis of Assisi, 1182-1226)

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