

TWENTY-SEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

October 4, 2020 A

Facilitator: *Let us take a minute to consciously acknowledge that we are in the presence of God and ask him to help us to hear the Word he wants us to hear this week.*

Pause for a moment and then play a religious song.

Opening prayer: *Lord Jesus, we gather in your name to share our lives and your Word. We thank you for this opportunity. Breathe your Spirit on us so that we may know the message you have for each of us today. Amen.*

Response to last week's Word: [Facilitator briefly recalls last week's Gospel.] *Let us spend a few minutes sharing how the Word we heard God speak to us last week has unfolded in our lives during the week.*

Facilitator reads focus statement: The first and third readings present an image of Israel as a vineyard where God, the Divine Planter and Cultivator, has sown his seed. But Israel has failed miserably to produce a good harvest. In the second reading, Paul exhorts the Philippians to avoid anxiety, to be prayerful, and to constantly seek to do what is honorable, good and true.

Let us listen to God's Word to hear what it is he wants to say to us in these readings today. As you hear a word, you may want to underline it or write it down to remember.

Read the first reading, the psalm, and the second reading, pausing briefly after each one.

FIRST READING: Isaiah 5:1-7

Isaiah 'sings of his friend' who has a vineyard. His friend (God) does everything he could for his vineyard (Israel) to produce good fruit. Instead, all it yields are sour grapes. Because the vineyard fails to respond to God's gracious care, it will become what it has been without his favor, namely, a wilderness. As we shall see, today's Gospel also echoes this theme of unfruitfulness.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 80

The theme of the vineyard is continued in this psalm. The psalmist petitions God to watch his vineyard.

SECOND READING: Philippians 4:6-9

Paul addresses the "worry warts" in the Philippian community. In times of worry and anxiety, they are exhorted to turn to God in prayer and place their trust in him. In doing so, they will come to know the "peace that surpasses all understanding." Then Paul exhorts his readers to live lives patterned after Christ. Christian thinking and behavior will open them to the kind of peace that only God can give.

PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL: Matt. 21:33-43

As we listen to this first reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our minds for the content.

A participant reads the Gospel, then all pause to reflect.

As we listen to this second reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our hearts to what Jesus is saying to us. Be aware of what draws us in and what part of the Gospel might be a challenge to embrace. You may want to underline or write down the word you hear.

GOSPEL: Matthew 21:33-43

Another of the judgment parables immediately follows last week's story of the two sons. These two parables are a call to conversion for both the Pharisees and the Chief Priests. In the parable, Jesus invites his audience to assess the characters in the story, and then applies the lesson of the story directly to his defiant audience. In passing judgment on the characters in the story, the religious leaders unwittingly pass judgment on themselves. Instead of welcoming Jesus as God's messenger, they, like the tenants, plan to kill him. Jesus tells the parable *not* to condemn the religious leaders, but to call them to conversion. If they repent of their sins, they too, like the Gentiles, will be part of God's kingdom.

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. Turn to the person next to you and share what verse or image in the readings caught your attention or drew you in. Was there a verse or aspect of the readings that challenged you?

The facilitator can decide which is more helpful: to share the next questions with the whole group, or to share in smaller groups of three or four.

2. In the second reading, Paul says: “*Have no anxiety at all...*” Easier said than done. What helps you to deal with anxiety?

3. Also in the second reading, Paul says: “*Keep doing what you have learned.*” Can you name one or two lessons you have learned in the course of your life?

4. We may throw ourselves into many things—e.g., children, relationships, parish, business, gardening—but in the end, all our efforts could produce “sour grapes.” What helps you to deal with poor results from a lot of effort?

5. How can we resist God’s call to ongoing conversion?

6. What is Jesus saying to us this Sunday about how a faithful disciple should act?

RESPONDING TO GOD’S WORD

Share with the person next to you one way you can act on this week’s readings. Suggestions: Be aware of what causes you to be anxious and how you deal with it. Be conscious of how God may be calling you to some form of conversion and how you may be resisting it.

JOURNALING

Having listened to God’s Word and listened to others reflections on it, take a quiet moment to reflect on what you are hearing God say to you. Your response will be what you bring to Eucharist on Sunday, asking Jesus to help you respond as he asks of you. When ready, jot down your reflections.

PRAYING WITH THE WORD

Facilitator: Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestion: *Jesus, many things in life can cause us to be anxious. When I become anxious, teach me how to place my trust in you.*

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING, PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Facilitator: What are we grateful for? For what or for whom do we need to pray?

CLOSING PRAYER (together)

*Loving and gracious God,
help us to put aside all anxiety
and put our trust in you
so that we can experience
the peace that passes all understanding.
This we pray through Christ our Lord.
Amen.*