

## 27th Sunday in Ordinary Time

A few months ago I was talking to my nephew who is only 8 years old. He said he was on summer vacation, and he did not have anything to do. Then I asked him to enroll himself in a music academy and learn to play some musical instruments, get some vocal training because I had heard that he sings pretty well, or go to a pool and learn to swim. I told him that God has given him all these talents to develop. He said, "I know I have those talents. But I am very shy. I do not want to use them." Then I asked him if I would be happy if I had given him a gift, and he hid it and never used it. He said, "No." I told him that God would not be happy either if he did not use the gifts given by Him. The following week I heard that he was enrolled in a music academy.

The theme of today's liturgy is being responsible stewards of every gift that God has given us. The idea of stewardship is all over the Bible. From Genesis to Revelation, it is clear that God intended us to be his stewards—caretakers of His creation. The entire universe with everything in it belongs to God, and sin is nothing but our attempt to possess what really does not belong to us. As God's stewards with everything that is entrusted to us, it is necessary that we bear fruits in our lives. Failure to produce good fruits will ultimately lead to rejection. We are the new Israel. We are the new people of God. The Lord's vineyard at present is the Church, and we Christians are the tenants from whom God expects fruits of righteousness.

Jesus has given the Church everything necessary to make Christians fruit-bearing. The Word of God, the Sacraments and the Holy Eucharist are all gifts that will enable us to become more responsible. Our lives are not our own. One of the great temptations of American life is to live as though all that matters is our own pleasure. The parable warns us that if we refuse to reform our lives and become productive, we also could be replaced as the old Israel was replaced by the "new" Israel. What kind of fruits are we producing as individuals and as a parish community? Sour grapes, as mentioned in the first reading? Our fruits will be good when we are a welcoming and inviting community, becoming a sign of Jesus' presence and love. Do we try to get to know other members of the church family? Or are we comfortable with just our own families and maybe a couple of others? There's a lot we can learn from others. That can't happen unless we get to know them.

It is not enough that we produce fruits. We also need to generously give to God what is His share. The vineyard belonged to the Lord and, when it was time for harvest, He sent His servants to get His share of the produce. Those servants are the prophets of the Old Testament. Those prophets were mistreated and some were killed. In the end, He sent His only Son, and His son was crucified. How do we treat the prophets of today? Mahatma Gandhi was killed. What about Abraham Lincoln, Thomas More, Archbishop Oscar Romero, Martin Luther King? There are countless victims of violence in our time.

October is “Respect Life” month. The worst victims of violence in our time are the unborn. We call it a “right to choose,” but the reality does not change. The sacred womb of a mother that God created to continue His works of creation has become a place of torture and destruction. A place where life is created has become a place where life is terminated. The safest place for a child has become the most violent place. Twelve hundred million lives have been lost all over the world in the last 25 years—35 percent of them in this country alone; 4400 lives are lost every day in this county. Just because we have made it legal, it does not mean that it is right. A Sunday school teacher was discussing the Ten Commandments with her five- and six-year olds. After explaining the commandment “*Honor thy father and mother,*” she asked, “*Is there a commandment that teaches us how to treat our brothers and sisters?*” Without missing a beat, one little boy answered, “Thou shall not kill!” All of us know what God wants from us. Human laws cannot go against divine laws or natural laws. What kind of fruits are we producing as a society? Will God be proud of what we have to offer Him as individuals and as a society? We are accountable for everything that God has given us. Every Eucharist reminds us of a God who gives us everything that He has. Let us work with His gifts, make more and give Him in return generously.