

OCTOBER 4, 2020
Sunday of 27th Week in OT
Matthew 21: 33-43

“THE UNCONDITIONAL LOVE OF GOD.”

“In 1978 a man travelled to Cincinnati to attend the funeral of Max Ellerbusch. Max had been like a father to this man for twenty years. Nothing unusual, except that as a 15-year-old this man had taken his mother’s car and struck and killed Max’s 5-year-old son. This was a week before Christmas in 1958. Soon after the accident, a surprised court heard Max ask that charges be dropped. Instead he wanted to give the death-car driver a job and help toward his education. Max did all that and more, virtually adopting the 15-year-old boy into his family. Max shared his home, time and understanding with the troubled youth. We might wonder, ‘How could Max do that? I could never befriend a wild teenager who had just killed my 5-year-old son. Max must have been a little crazy to go out of his way that much to become like a father for that boy.’ But if Max Ellerbusch was a little crazy, so is God.”¹

Our First, Responsorial Psalm and Gospel readings talk about the Lord’s vineyard. In the First Reading Prophet Isaiah pointed out the generosity of God towards His chosen people Israel. God was with them as they wandered in the desert until they reached the promise land of milk and honey. The Lord asked, “What more was there to do for my vineyard that I have not done in it?”² God guided and gave them manna, food, honey and water but they still complained and not satisfied. The Lord even said, “he expected justice, but saw bloodshed; righteousness, but heard a cry!”³

In today’s Gospel, the parable describes God as a landowner who ready and arranged an awesome and beautiful vineyard and offered it to His people to watch,

¹ <http://frtonyshomilies.com>

² Isaiah 5: 4 NRSV Catholic Bible Press, USA

³ Isaiah 5: 7 NRSV Catholic Bible Press, USA

manage and make it fruitful. “However, His people wanted not just their share of the harvest, but the whole thing. They even abused and killed the prophets God sent to help them. Finally, in a desperate attempt to save His vineyard and His people, God sent His own Son, hoping they would respect and honour Him. Nonetheless, they abused and killed Him too in an effort to seize His inheritance. ‘What a silly story,’ we might say. ‘No landowner in his right mind would risk sending his own son among rebels who had already murdered his messengers. How crazy can you get? Who can believe in a God so dumb?’ But that is precisely the point of the parable. Where we would cry for vengeance on the tenants, God chose an alternative – the alternative of unconditional love.”⁴

Let us look at the life of St. Francis of Assisi who heard the voice of the Lord to built His church taking the risks of rejection, and even called him a folly, a mad man, and stupid during his time. “Francis' conversion did not happen over night. God had waited for him for twenty-five years and now it was Francis' turn to wait. Francis started to spend more time in prayer. He went off to a cave and wept for his sins. One day while riding through the countryside, Francis, the man who loved beauty, who was so picky about food, who hated deformity, came face to face with a leper. Repelled by the appearance and the smell of the leper, Francis nevertheless jumped down from his horse and kissed the hand of the leper. When his kiss of peace was returned, Francis was filled with joy. As he rode off, he turned around for a last wave, and saw that the leper had disappeared. He always looked upon it as a test from God...that he had passed. His search for conversion led him to the ancient church at San Damiano. While he was praying there, he heard Christ on the crucifix speak to him, "Francis, repair my church." Francis assumed this meant church with a small c -- the crumbling building he was in. Soon Francis started to preach. (He was never a priest, though he was later ordained a deacon under his protest.) Francis was not a reformer; he preached about returning to God and obedience to the Church. Francis

⁴ <http://frtonyshomilies.com>

must have known about the decay in the Church, but he always showed the Church and its people his utmost respect. Francis' final years were filled with suffering as well as humiliation. Praying to share in Christ's passion he had a vision received the stigmata, the marks of the nails and the lance wound that Christ suffered, in his own body.”⁵

My brothers and sisters, we are called to tend and work at the vineyard of the Lord. Are we willing to work at His vineyard even if they are much more to do, be rejected, abused, and even killed for the sake of the kingdom? Today and even many centuries ago, there's a lot of prophets, leaders and members of the Church experienced rejection, abused and even killed like St. Joan of Arc, St. Thomas More, or Bishop Oscar Romero, and others. Or like St. Francis who were called a mad man for Christ. This is the price of following the Lord. So, are we ready to take the risks? Are we willing to give all for Christ? Let us ask St. Francis of Assisi that we may love and serve all despite rejection and denunciation and that we may build the church according to God's plan, that is, a community patterned in the heart of Jesus.

Let this be our prayer: “Thank you, Lord Jesus Christ, for all the benefits which you have given us - for all the pains and insults which you have borne for us. O most merciful redeemer, friend, and brother, may we know you more clearly, love you more dearly, and follow you more nearly, for your own sake. Amen.” (prayer of St. Richard of Chichester, 13th century)⁶

⁵ www.catholic.org/saints

⁶ www.dailyscripture.net