**Day for Life, Oct. 4th 2020**

**Some thoughts on the Scripture Readings**

1. **The Vineyard as a Symbol of Fruitfulness**

The image of the vineyard in so many of our Scripture readings today brings with it the memory of holidays spent walking in the countryside of France, Spain and Italy. In the evenings, there was fresh cooked local food washed down with a few glasses of local wine.

In winter, the vines are cut back so severely that all you see is what appears to be a dried up old stump that could not possibly support life. In Spring time, the vines begin to grow, the rich foliage appears and, by September, the branches are weighed down with bunches of grapes. What happens between winter and harvest time is a mixture of what God gives (the sun, the rain and the soil) and the work of human hands.

1. **I have Come that You May have Life**

In the Scriptures the vineyard is a symbol for the people of God. Sometimes we bear the fruit that God wants. His plan, to use the words of Jesus, is that we might “have life and have it in abundance”. The readings today carry that hope, but there is also a strong mood of disappointment that, all too often, God’s people reject God’s plan and choose a path that cannot lead to life.

1. **The Day for Life – giving thanks and taking responsibility**

Today, the Church all over Ireland celebrates the *Day for Life*. This is a day for thanksgiving and also a day for renewing commitment. We pause for a moment in the midst of all the complexities of our daily lives, to give thanks for the gift of life that we ourselves have received. We think with gratitude of the lives of our parents and our children, our nephews and nieces, our brothers and sisters. It is a moment when we can remember our family members and friends who have given birth to a child in recent times.

The *Day for Life* is an invitation to us to remember in prayer, those who are waiting hopefully or anxiously for the birth of a child. Alongside our sense of gratitude, the *Day for Life* seeks to nourish in us a spirit of responsibility and solidarity, recognising that, like the grapes on the vine, the gift of life cannot be taken for granted. Today, the Church invites all Catholics to renew their commitment to welcoming the gift of life and to actively supporting mothers and fathers in making choices which are life giving, not just for their child, but also for themselves.

1. **The Reality of Abortion and the Invitation to Reconciliation and Healing**

In any Church congregation, there will be people who, at some point in their lives, have been touched by abortion. It may have been as a result of a decision that they made themselves, or a decision that somebody else made, or failed to make. Understandably, any reference to abortion can bring back painful memories. That is not the intention. The “Day for Life” is not about recrimination; it is about acknowledging the truth so that we can be reconciled and find healing.

There are very few of us who have not made bad decisions in our lives. Sometimes we find it hard to forgive ourselves, or to see any way back from those decisions. God doesn’t have that problem. He is rich in mercy and compassion, for those who turn to him. As Jesus once said: “Does nobody condemn you; neither do I. Go away and sin no more”. That is what the Sacrament of Reconciliation (or Confession), is all about and any Catholic should feel free to ask for that Sacrament at any time. Sometimes, of course, even when we have been to confession and we know that we have been forgiven, we still carry with us the pain of something that happened, perhaps many years ago in very different circumstances. Many people have gone on to find healing through their participation in the Rachel’s Vineyard retreat.

1. **Abortion and Society**

During 2019, there were 6,666 abortions in the Republic of Ireland and in the vast majority of cases, no reason was asked or given. During the past twelve months, because of decisions originally taken in the UK parliament, unborn babies in Northern Ireland have had the most fundamental of all human rights, the right to life, taken from them. Each abortion is not just a human tragedy for the baby whose life is taken away. It is also a tragedy for the mother and, perhaps in a different way, for the father and for so many others, who are already joined to this unborn baby in a network of relationships, which does not end with death.

The baby who dies as a result of abortion, is still held safely for eternity in the hand of God. But abortion is also about what becomes of us as a society. In our Scripture readings today, there is a direct connection between the failure to tend and care for the vines, and the eventual destruction of the vineyard. In much the same way, a society which fails to protect life or to care for the most vulnerable, inevitably loses something of its fruitfulness.

We live in what Pope Francis often calls a throw-away society. If something is broken, or even if it is no longer fashionable, we throw it away on the basis that we can always get another one. That “throw-away culture”, he suggests, has begun to impact on our attitude to the gift of life itself. Today it is the human embryo and the child in the womb. Tomorrow it could very easily be our family members and friends with terminal illness. It is time for us, both as individuals and as a society, to step back from the brink.

As we prayed in the Psalm: *God of hosts, bring us back. Let your face shine on us and we shall be saved.*

Sunday 4 October 2020

27th Sunday in Ordinary Time ◼︎

Readings at Mass

First reading

Isaiah 5:1-7

Against the Lord’s vineyard

Let me sing to my friend

the song of his love for his vineyard.

My friend had a vineyard

on a fertile hillside.

He dug the soil, cleared it of stones

and planted choice vines in it.

In the middle he built a tower,

he dug a press there too.

He expected it to yield grapes,

but sour grapes were all that it gave.

And now, inhabitants of Jerusalem

and men of Judah,

I ask you to judge

between my vineyard and me.

What could I have done for my vineyard

that I have not done?

I expected it to yield grapes.

Why did it yield sour grapes instead?

Very well, I will tell you

what I am going to do to my vineyard:

I will take away its hedge for it to be grazed on,

and knock down its wall for it to be trampled on.

I will lay it waste, unpruned, undug;

overgrown by the briar and the thorn.

I will command the clouds

to rain no rain on it.

Yes, the vineyard of the Lord of Hosts

is the House of Israel,

and the men of Judah

that chosen plant.

He expected justice, but found bloodshed,

integrity, but only a cry of distress.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 79(80):9,12-16,19-20

The vineyard of the Lord is the house of Israel.

You brought a vine out of Egypt;

 to plant it you drove out the nations.

It stretched out its branches to the sea,

 to the Great River it stretched out its shoots.

The vineyard of the Lord is the house of Israel.

Then why have you broken down its walls?

 It is plucked by all who pass by.

It is ravaged by the boar of the forest,

 devoured by the beasts of the field.

The vineyard of the Lord is the house of Israel.

God of hosts, turn again, we implore,

 look down from heaven and see.

Visit this vine and protect it,

 the vine your right hand has planted.

The vineyard of the Lord is the house of Israel.

And we shall never forsake you again;

 give us life that we may call upon your name.

God of hosts, bring us back;

 let your face shine on us and we shall be saved.

The vineyard of the Lord is the house of Israel.

Second reading

Philippians 4:6-9

If there is anything you need, pray for it.

There is no need to worry; but if there is anything you need, pray for it, asking God for it with prayer and thanksgiving, and that peace of God, which is so much greater than we can understand, will guard your hearts and your thoughts, in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers, fill your minds with everything that is true, everything that is noble, everything that is good and pure, everything that we love and honour, and everything that can be thought virtuous or worthy of praise. Keep doing all the things that you learnt from me and have been taught by me and have heard or seen that I do. Then the God of peace will be with you.

Gospel

Matthew 21:33-43

This is the landlord's heir: come, let us kill him

Jesus said to the chief priests and the elders of the people, ‘Listen to another parable. There was a man, a landowner, who planted a vineyard; he fenced it round, dug a winepress in it and built a tower; then he leased it to tenants and went abroad. When vintage time drew near he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his produce. But the tenants seized his servants, thrashed one, killed another and stoned a third. Next he sent some more servants, this time a larger number, and they dealt with them in the same way. Finally he sent his son to them. “They will respect my son” he said. But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, “This is the heir. Come on, let us kill him and take over his inheritance.” So they seized him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?’ They answered, ‘He will bring those wretches to a wretched end and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will deliver the produce to him when the season arrives.’ Jesus said to them, ‘Have you never read in the scriptures:

It was the stone rejected by the builders

that became the keystone.

This was the Lord’s doing

and it is wonderful to see?

‘I tell you, then, that the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit.’

The Gospel of the Lord