

27th Sunday in Ordinary Time – A Cycle
October 5, 2014

INTRODUCTION - (*Isaiah 5,1-7; Matthew 21,33-43*) Most of us know how much work is involved in caring for a garden. Just imagine how much work is involved with setting up an entire vineyard. It is a full time occupation. In today's first reading, Isaiah the prophet, who lived in the 8th century BC, describes some of what was involved in caring for a vineyard. If we wonder why there needed to be a watchtower in the vineyard, it was needed, both day and night, to protect the grapes from thieves and predators, especially during harvest time. Apparently Isaiah was a musician as well as a talented poet. As he sang his song, we can imagine the shock his audience felt when they discovered they were the vineyard he was singing about. From history we know Isaiah's prophecy about the destruction of the vineyard literally proved to be true when first the Assyrians then later the Babylonians invaded the land of Israel and destroyed most of the cities, villages, homes and farms in Israel.

HOMILY – At this point in Matthew's gospel, Jesus is in Jerusalem at the Temple. Remember, the Temple was a large open area, enclosed by walls, but not a ceiling. The walls indicated where certain people were allowed to pray. The outside wall of the Temple formed the largest space about 4 football fields long and 2 ½ football fields wide. Spaces were marked off for Gentiles and Jews, men and women, laity and priests. In the center of it all was the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies, where only the high priest could enter. Jesus had just cleansed the Temple of people buying and selling animals for sacrifice and of the money changers. Now he dares to teach in the Temple and even to heal sick people (who by law were not allowed in the Temple). It is the beginning of the last week of Jesus' earthly life, the week we call Holy Week. The elders and chief priests challenged him. They wanted to know who authorized him to do the things he was doing. Jesus answered their challenge by speaking three parables. The first of these three we heard last week, about the man who had two sons. He asked both of them to work in his vineyard. The first son said "no" but later regretted his response and went to work in the vineyard. The second son said "yes" to his father, but never went. Jesus compared the greatest sinners to the first son. They repented and reformed their lives through the preaching of John the Baptist. The elders and high priests, in other words, the Jewish religious leaders, were compared to the second son, who talked a good talk, but they didn't walk the path of holiness that John preached.

Today's parable is Jesus' second response to the Jewish leaders and next Sunday's is the third. They all tell us something about the kingdom. Today's parable is very easy to understand. The people of Israel are often compared to a vineyard in the Scriptures, and our first reading today is one of the best examples of that comparison. In the passage from Isaiah, the first reading, the complaint was with the grapes, they were too sour to be eaten or to be used for wine. In the gospel, notice that the problem is not with the grapes, but with those charged with the task of caring for the vineyard; in other words, the Jewish religious leaders. Throughout their 1000 year history, the leaders almost always rejected the teaching of the prophets. Often the prophets were put to

death for doing what God had sent them to do. In the parable, the first two groups who were sent to the vineyard to obtain the fruit that was owed to the owner represent the prophets God sent. So the owner of the vineyard (that is, God) decided to send his son. It would be a huge offense (as well as a very stupid thing to do) if the workers rejected or harmed the son. It would be as grievous as if they were to do anything to the owner himself. But they thought they could get by with it. Instead, they lost everything they did have. Sometimes that happens to us when we get too greedy – one of the several lessons the story of Adam and Eve teaches us. Or as a friend of mine remarked when he lost a lot of money in the stock market: “you can be a bull or you can be a bear, but you can’t be a pig.”

The lesson on the kingdom: God looks for holiness among his people and he looks for those with authority, not only religious leaders but also parents and teachers, to lead God’s people in that direction. It’s a big responsibility. St. Paul, in today’s second reading, gives us a good description of a holy life: a life of prayer, and thanksgiving, a life of trust in God’s providence, a life of whatever is pure, honorable, just, gracious, a life of following the teachings and example of Jesus. Amen.

28th Sunday Ordinary Time – A Cycle

Oct. 12, 2014

INTRODUCTION: (*Isaiah 25, 6-10a; Matthew 22, 1-14*) Today’s first reading and today’s gospel give us a beautiful picture of what it is we’re praying for when we say “thy will be done.” God’s will is for our complete and eternal happiness. Our gospel warns us, however, that in order to be part of his beautiful plan, we need to respond to the invitation he offers us. Our second reading is part of a thank you note St. Paul wrote to the Philippians for the money they sent him to help him most probably while he was in prison. The Philippian community was the only community that were thoughtful enough to offer him any support in his ministry.

HOMILY: Once more I wish to remind you that at this point in Matthew’s gospel we are beginning the last week of Jesus’ life here on earth. That week is known to us as Holy Week. As that week began, Jesus entered Jerusalem triumphantly, he went into the Temple and in anger drove out those carrying on business in the Temple, accusing them of having turned the Temple into a den of thieves. Then Jesus began teaching the crowd. People who were blind and lame were forbidden by law to enter the Temple, but when they entered and approached Jesus, instead of scolding them for entering, he healed them. The elders and priests confronted Jesus and demanded to know who gave him the authority to do what he was doing. He responded to them with three parables describing the kingdom of heaven. We have already heard two of those parables on the past two Sundays. Today we hear the third.

It is very similar to last Sunday’s parable. The king in the parable represents God. A royal wedding at the time of Jesus would have been a spectacular event, as exciting and awesome as anything the ordinary person might get to experience in their entire

lifetime. As the parable begins it is assumed that the invited guests would have accepted the invitation when it was first offered, but by the time of the great event, they all changed their mind. They do not even offer an excuse, rather their rejection of the invitation and their violence toward the messengers from the king has the appearance of a rebellion on the part of the citizens against the king. And so the king's response is severe and he invites others to the banquet. The last part of the parable about not having a wedding garment reminds us if we are going to participate in this awesome event, we must come with the right attitude. Those judged worthy of the eternal banquet must come equipped with the deeds of an authentic Christian life. Their good deeds go with them as the book of Revelation tells us, and we should have some good deeds to bring with us.

I want to shift now to today's second reading. St. Paul is thanking the Philippian community for their goodness to him. He has a nice way of expressing his gratitude, as he says: "it was kind of you to share in my distress." In many ways the people of this parish share in the work of the parish, through sharing with us their time, talent and treasure. Today I want to talk about the treasure part of what you share. It is required of pastors that I do so. In a few days, I will send a letter out along with a finance report for our fiscal year July 1, 2013 to June 30, 2014. That same report is in today's bulletin, in case you do not get a letter. Financially it was not a year to brag about. We ended the year almost \$40,000 in the red. However, God is good. A very kind and thoughtful person bailed us out by leaving St. Boniface Church a bequest for about \$90,000 which just came to us a couple of weeks ago. God is good! That bequest will not only help us with our \$40,000 deficit from our last fiscal year, but it will help us with sidewalk repair around the area of the school which was recently completed.

We had no big surprises this past year, and we do not anticipate any major repairs this current fiscal year. What concerns me most is that already this fiscal year, since July 1, our collections are down almost \$15,000. If they continue to drop at that rate, we will end the fiscal year about \$60,000 in the red. I know that many of our parishioners come from outside of Northside and age and weather make it more difficult for them to be here. When you can't get here to Mass on a particular weekend, please, if you can, increase your contribution the next time you do come, or use direct deposit. We cannot close the church down when people are missing and we always have bills to pay.

We have an important ministry here at St. Boniface. You share in that ministry by your financial support. I am optimistic about our future. New people are going to be moving into Northside when a couple of building projects are finished and I am hopeful these should increase our attendance. But until we see that happen, St. Boniface has to rely on our faithful and generous parishioners. If you can share more generously, please do so. I know you are asking right now "what do you mean by more generously; give us a number." I figure it will take between a 5% and 10% increase in weekly income to bring us to where we need to be. I especially thank all of you for your support each Sunday and I pray you will help us to keep serving the Lord as we do. Remember, you will not outdo the Lord in generosity. You will be blessed by God more generously than you can imagine for your generous sharing in his work. Amen.

29th Sunday Ordinary Time – A Cycle
October 19, 2014

INTRODUCTION: (*Isaiah 45, 1.4-6; Mt. 22, 15-21*) Roughly six hundred years before Christ, the Babylonians (people living in what is Iraq today) conquered the Jews, destroyed everything they could and took most of the Jews to Babylon to be their slaves. Roughly 50 years later, the Persians (people living in what is Iran today) conquered the Babylonians. Cyrus was king of Persia at that time and he allowed the Jews to return to their own home in Israel. He even encouraged them to rebuild their temple to Yahweh. In today's first reading, we hear how the prophet saw God working through the Persian king, Cyrus. He calls Cyrus God's anointed. Cyrus, of course, claimed that he had overcome the Babylonians by his own strength and shrewdness. Isaiah said it was God who made it happen. We are reminded that even though God chooses to work through human agents, people who have a free will, God is still supreme and Lord throughout all of history and to him belongs all glory and honor.

HOMILY: In Matthew's gospel, we are in the last week of Jesus' life. The hostility toward Jesus had been rising rapidly after Jesus had cleansed the Temple. In today's gospel the Pharisees, who would have liked to see him dead, took an opportunity to attack him. They approached him along with the Herodians. This is significant. The Pharisees hated the Romans who were ruling Israel and the Herodians were favorable toward the Romans and cooperated with them. This left Jesus in trouble with one group or the other depending on how he answered the question about paying taxes to Caesar.

You might find it interesting to know that the tax in question was to be paid with a Roman coin which contained an image of the emperor and had on it the words: "Tiberius Caesar, august son of the divine Augustus, high priest." The Jews were against images to start with, and they would certainly have been against the reference to Caesar Augustus as divine. In spite of any objections, they may have had, however, they were able to produce a coin when Jesus didn't have one. By the way, the value of the tax was one denarius, owed by everyone between the ages of 12 or 14 to age 65. A denarius was one full day's pay for a laborer (things sure have changed.) There were other taxes, of course, taxes on what a farmer produced or what was transported, but there was a considerable amount of opposition among the Jews to this particular tax, not because it was excessive, I suspect, but more out of principle.

Jesus' answer was brilliant. Since the coin had the emperor's image engraved on it, it belonged to him. So give him what is his, but (and this is the important message in Jesus' answer) don't forget to give to God what belongs to God (love, prayer, sacrifice and obedience). In his answer Jesus allowed for limited cooperation with the Romans, but he did not allow for cheating God of what rightfully was owed to God.

I'm sure most of us find it much easier to cheat God than to cheat the government. If we cheat on our taxes, someone may soon notify us that we owe more than we claimed we owed. If we cheat on the time we owe God or cheat on following God's laws, no

angel comes knocking, but it is our loss if we have not met our obligation to God, and what we have lost by cheating God can only be regained by a change of heart.

Without Jesus saying it, experience has taught us that the more we cheat God, the further we drift away from him. But Jesus has taught this in other places in the gospels. His answer achieved what he intended for it to achieve, to put the Pharisees in their place and to reveal their dishonest intentions.

*Fr. Joe was on vacation the 30th Sunday (Oct. 26) and
Deacon Jerry preached on the Feast of All Souls (Nov. 2).*