

## THE TWENTY-SEVENTH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR – A

The readings this Sunday speak of Israel in parable, the parable of a vineyard. In the gospel reading it is the tenants of the Lord's vineyard who will not listen to the messengers sent by the Lord and eventually kill the Lord's son hoping to take control of the vineyard themselves. In the first reading, although planted and cared for properly the vineyard has failed to produce the appropriate fruit and the Lord lets it wither. In the second reading Paul teaches the Philippians to 'Keep doing everything you learnt from me and were told by me and have heard or seen me doing.'

The **First Reading** comes from the prophet Isaiah, the first part of the book, chs.1-39. Isaiah was born about 765 BC and received his prophetic vocation while in the Temple in Jerusalem. His mission was to proclaim the fall of Israel and Judah as punishment for the nation's infidelity. He exercised his ministry for forty years and proclaimed his teaching in four distinct periods. It seems Isaiah finished his teaching by 700, after which date we know nothing of the prophet. There is a tradition that his life ended in martyrdom. His writings show Isaiah to be a poet of genius. The revelation of the transcendence of God and of human unworthiness he received in the Temple at the time of his call left a lasting mark on the prophet. For Isaiah God is an awesome God, a God who is Holy, Strong, the Mighty One, the King, we are his creatures defiled by sin for which God demands reparation insisting on just living among his people and sincerity in divine worship. Isaiah is the prophet of faith, he insists the people should trust in God in times of national crisis, by this alone will salvation be attained. Isaiah's hope is that a remnant of the people will recognise the Messiah for its King. This Messiah is to be a descendant of David. A prophet of considerable standing, Isaiah gathered round him a school of disciples who preserved his teaching.

The reading, 5.1-7, is the song of the vineyard, a poem composed by Isaiah at the beginning of his ministry. The theme is Israel as a vine chosen and afterwards rejected a prophecy spoken before Israel's enemies attack. Isaiah teaches of God's love for his vineyard, the people of Israel, which he plants with choice vines and builds a wine press expecting a good vintage but all he found at harvest time were wild, sour grapes. So God asks the people to judge. What more could God have done to ensure a good vintage? No answer is given. So God decides to remove the vineyard's protective wall and allow it to fall into ruin, no rain will be allowed to fall on the ground. The reading concludes by explaining the parable. God's vineyard is the House of Israel, his chosen people. God expected to find justice but found bloodshed, cries of distress in place of integrity. When their enemies came Israel was unprepared.

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 79.9,12-16,19-20, following the first reading is a prayer for the restoration of Israel. The psalm takes up the image of the first reading, 'You brought a vine out of Egypt.' Israel is that vine and God provided for all their needs in the Promised Land driving out the nations who occupied it, but now this land is laid waste, ravaged by wild beasts because of their infidelity. The third verse is a prayer imploring God to return and give his protection once again to Israel for, in the final verse, Israel promises never to forsake God again. The psalm ends with the refrain, 'God of hosts bring us back; let your face shine on us and we will be saved.'

The **Second Reading** is from Paul's letter to the Philippians. Philippi, one of the principal cities of Macedonia, had been evangelized by Paul in 50 A.D. on his second missionary journey. Paul is now on his third missionary journey and is imprisoned in Ephesus, the capital of Roman Asia. He hopes to revisit the Church at Philippi and while in prison he writes to them a friendly letter, giving some news to his converts there. He warns them to 'Beware of evil workmen!' who will destroy the unity of love and joy which he so much desires for them based on humility, the humility of Christ and to that end he gives the Philippians a poem on the humility of the Messiah. This poem may or may not be from Paul's pen, but it gives witness to early Christian understanding of the nature of Christ.

The reading, 4,6-9, is part of the final advice Paul gives to the Philippians. He wants them to be happy always and says, 'There is no need to worry.' They must pray for whatever they need and the peace of Christ will guard their hearts and thoughts, a peace 'which is beyond our understanding.' Paul concludes by encouraging them to fill their hearts with everything that is true, honourable, upright and pure and they must follow Paul's teaching and example 'then the peace of God will be with you.'