

Homily for the 27th Sunday in Ordinary Time

October 7-8, 2017

Readings: Readings: Isaiah 5:1-7; Philippians 4: 6-9; Matthew 21:33-43

Preacher: Gloria Ulterino

Violence, mayhem and murder! What a tough Gospel! To say nothing of Isaiah's judgment! Are we to be forever stuck with a god who seemingly hurls thunder bolts? Who seemingly indicts and punishes? Or, is something far greater at work here?

Listen again to the God of Isaiah. To the agonizing lament: "What more was there to do for my vineyard that I have not done?" Listen again to the God of Jesus. I sent slaves. And more slaves! (Meaning, prophets and *more* prophets.) I even sent my *son*! And *still* they did not hear! What *more* could I have done? Isn't this a rejected, heart-broken God? A God who only yearns—again and again—for people who produce good fruit? Yet, apparently, to no avail!

Have we—you and I—ever been heart-broken? And rejected? I've heard parents pierce the heavens with longing for their children who have succumbed to addiction. Who have seemingly ignored all they've been taught. Perhaps we *ourselves* have cried out, after yet another failure, after yet another rejection: "What *more* could I have done?"

Surely, we've recently recoiled at the spewed out hatred of white supremacists armed to the teeth on the streets of Charlottesville, "Jews will not replace us!" Surely we've come to know that "ism's" are still very much with us. That Blacks are *still* stopped by some cops for no apparent reason. That women are *still* told they just aren't fit matter for ordination. That LGBTQ people are *still* the butt of name-calling. In truth, we've all known rejection, one way or another. But. Have we ever considered that this experience can help us identify with our God? Our heart-broken God, who is and has been routinely rejected, year in and year out, day in and day out?

Can we hear today's Gospel out of *that* experience? It's a familiar enough story, found first in Mark and also in Luke. But only in Matthew does God—the vineyard owner—openly lament. Hope against hope for a people who will "get it." Who will see, hear, receive, and change their fisted hearts to softened ones. Only in

Matthew does God offer to give the kingdom “to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom.” By now, Jesus has healed. Fed people. Proclaimed from the very depths of his heart all that he’s heard from his God. And *still*: some religious leaders refuse to see, refuse to hear. Can’t they possibly understand that the God of Jesus is only yearning, *longing* for anyone and everyone to dig deeper, again and again, into the soil of our human hearts to our very core? To see, hear, receive, and act on the continual whoosh, the flow, the energy of God’s love for us all?

One woman did. A young Dutch, Jewish woman, Etty Hillesum, killed in Auschwitz in November 1943 at age 27. But not before she recorded a diary of her ongoing struggle to become a lover of God. It tickled me when she spoke of herself as a “kneeler in training.” And I certainly identified with her daily attempts to dig away the rubble of her heart. Yet, in time she could proclaim: peace could only come “when we have all vanquished and transformed our hatred for our fellow human beings of whatever race even into love one day, although perhaps that is asking too much.” But, she insisted, this was the *only* way to peace. In her very last letter to a friend, Etty proclaimed, “If only we care enough, God is in safe hands with us.”

How on earth can we care enough? That much? Let’s face it: this is tough. The cranky ones ... the difficult ones (including us) ... the ones with whom we disagree will always be there! And yet, there’s always more. There’s Paul, writing to his beloved community in Philippi from prison, probably in Ephesus. Knowing, as did Etty, that his *real* prison guard has become the God of peace. The Only One who is “true, honorable, just, pure ... and worthy of praise.” The *Only* One to whom we can turn for help.

And there’s lots of folks, just like us, who live this out, every day, in bits and pieces. The woman who makes and brings a pie of welcome. Or the woman who doggedly overcomes her cystic fibrosis to live fully, each day. Or Fr. Jim Martin, who shows a way to “Building A Bridge” between LGBTQ folks and the official Church through respect, compassion and sensitivity. Most of all, he walks the talk, even under surly attacks.

For the truth is this: ours is *not* a god of thunderbolts. No! That god is merely a human invention by people in pain, who have somehow refused the lavish love of God, for whatever reason. No, *our* God loves us enough to become vulnerable to

us. Suffer with us and for us. Even become heartbroken on our behalf. So that we might only turn, again and again, as often and as long as it takes, to mirror our God. And, in the process, help heal the heartbreak of God.