

Homily for the 27th Sunday in Ordinary Time

October 3-4, 2020

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

Preacher: Margot Van Etten

Oh, my. *“He looked for judgment, but see, bloodshed! For justice, but look, the outcry!”*

Something is wrong: the cherished vineyard has produced strange, sour fruit.

This morning I was talking with an old and wise man who for the first time sounded utterly overcome by all the bad news that has come our way this year, all the turmoil in our community and our nation.

What do we say to him? How do we avoid becoming overwhelmed, not only by events, but by the question of our responsibility in all of this?

There is an old, old saying: “For want of a vision the people are lost.” I think this is a key. So much of the vision in our world now seems to be cramped, hostile or fearful, seeing life as a zero-sum game. Everything is limited, and if you get something, I lose something. On a large scale, the racism, sexism, hostile nationalism, assaults on human life and on our planet come from this cramped and, stingy vision.

We need to find God’s vision for us and for our world.

Have you ever sat in silent meditation, or in some beautiful spot in Nature, or looked at the moon or gazed at a starry night sky, or listened to a moving piece of music—and felt as if you and everything around you *belonged*— as if you were at one with everything in the deep peace that reveals God’s presence?

That’s the vision.

And that vision will sustain us and guide us to bring forth sweet and wholesome fruit in our own souls, in our actions and in our world. That vision helps us to understand how profoundly interconnected we are to one another, to our planet and indeed to all of God’s creation. Because that’s how God sees everything—through the lens of love that is God’s very being. That is why Black lives need to be held up in our culture in a special way, as do Indigenous lives, Hispanic, Asian, unborn and elderly lives, impoverished, disabled or oppressed, imprisoned and even criminal lives, even lives that are approaching their end—as well as the lives of our cousins the animals and even the planet itself. All these lives are interconnected, and in God’s vision every one matters infinitely. *Every one* is cherished. And *every one* needs to be upheld in order for all to flourish.

That vision of interconnectedness is what has made St. Francis of Assisi, whose feast we celebrate today (October 4), so beloved by Catholics and non-Catholics alike. He saw all

creatures—animals, elements, the Earth herself as related with each other and as our relatives. Brother Sun, Sister Moon, Brother Fire, Sister Water, Mother Earth.... But that understanding went way beyond the appealing picture of the saint preaching to the birds. It included living *among lepers*, sharing and offering comfort in the disaster of their lives. It meant *embracing poverty*. And you know how the statues and pictures show him in that nice, clean brown robe? I've seen one of his preserved habits: even without being blackened by age it resembled a far less picturesque *burlap bag*! And even in Italy, it gets *cold in winter*. So embracing all these things meant embracing discomfort, even suffering, as well.

And yet he experienced incredible joy, and that is what still draws us to him. The joy of intimacy with God, of living out God's vision in a far more complete and radical way than any of us will be called to do. Of realizing that truly everyone is our relation—and that "everyone" includes the whole thing. All of it. The entire web of creation, all the beings and all the humans—including the ones we'd prefer not to be bothered with.

If we want to see our world healed; if we want to find that calm center in our own lives; if we want a sure guide for how to act, how to vote, how to help—we will do well to seek out this vision. In prayer, in the presence of Nature, or music, or whatever helps us to connect. In God's loving vision, rooted in Christ, no matter what happens we can find a sure and certain guide and harbor right in the middle of all the chaos. Because it's all connected and held in God's loving embrace. As are we.