

27th SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME YEAR A HOMILY 2020

PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY AGAIN AND PRODUCTIVITY

Mt 21.33-43 Is 5.1-9 Phil 4.1-9

Welcome once more to our ongoing virtual celebrations of Eucharist here at St Therese's in Essendon. The 1st October was St Therese of Lisieux's Feast Day, which we could only celebrate virtually, but our primary school students are having an on-line liturgy this coming week, in which I'll participate.

The 4th of October is the Feast of St Francis of Assisi, and a good time to reflect on the beauty and fragility of ourselves, all God's creatures, and the wonderful world around us. Francis was well attuned to the environment, ahead of his time for the 13th century, living from 1181 to 1226, dying at 45. Did you know that within 10 years of his founding the Order, there were 5,000 members! Another bit of trivia is that the Franciscan brown habit is based on a second-hand peasant's garment, tied around with string that Francis wore? And he tried to convert the Muslims (not so successfully), and initiated the custom of the Nativity crib in church at Christmas, and he marketed that well! Of course, we also know that, like Doctor Dolittle, he loved and talked to the animals, charming the birds out of the trees (*I made that bit up!*)! Not to forget either *Brother Sun and Sister Moon*. And it's also the end of the '**Season of Creation**' for 2020, so it suitably ties in with many of the themes of good old Francis.

On a very sad note, Margaret Kovacs, another of our faithful and involved parishioners, died early this week. Her funeral will be here on Tuesday at 10am. We remember her with fond gratitude and offer our sympathy to her loving husband Laszlo, and children Adam, Emma and Daniel; also Eddie Gauci's funeral will be on Monday this coming week, and we offer sympathy to his wife Lyn Gauci and their sons Jonathan, Lewis and Ryan. We remember them as now we gather from near and far for Eucharist, together in spirit.

On a very happy note, we congratulate Steve and Marie McKenna, who celebrated their golden anniversary of marriage this week.

"So far, the 21st century has been a century of menace and insecurity. The threats have come in rapid succession: terrorism, financial collapse, plague, climate change, the quaking of (our) democracy. For good reasons, a tone of heightened alarm has become the default setting across the media... As a temperament and philosophy, conservatism has one central premise: Humans are fallen beings, and the crust of civilization is thin. We are able to live sweetly because over the centuries we have constructed a moral and social order, which is fragile and requires constant tending." I quote this from an article by journalist David Brooks in the New York Times, titled **"At His Core, Trump is an Immoralist."** He is said to be pro-life, but one can only surmise that is an attempt to get the votes of the Christian right. He's all in favour of capital punishment, and the fact of the horrific figure of 200,000+ coronavirus deaths in the USA (the most in the world), raise questions about inconsistency, irresponsibility, contradiction, and, of course, the real truth! Waving a Bible about doesn't say or mean anything.

What we are seeing is not conservatism, then, but the undermining of the normal order of civility, inclusion, a fair go, and justice for all, to name but a few requirements for any civilized society. That was on full display in the embarrassing shambles of a debate the other day. Racism is unacceptable and morally wrong in all circumstances. Sadly, some on the Catholic and evangelical far right of the spectrum, don't seem to see the inconsistencies, even though Gospel values of truth and social justice are not evident, from any angle.

Today's Gospel portrays the negativity and destructive effects of jealousy, greed, violence and irresponsibility, requiring to be overcome with genuine faith and good works on the part of us all.

And so, I move to Martin Luther, formerly an Augustinian priest, who did some good things, like challenging head-on the corruption within the Roman Church, translating the Bible into German, as no mean feat, and initiating the Reformation! Yet, his attitude to the Jews was virtually malevolent and unconscionable, becoming worse as he got older. One tract he wrote in 1543 was a vicious diatribe, titled *“On the Jews and their lies.”* Hitler is said to have quoted Luther as just one justification for the evils of the Holocaust. Even the Good Friday prayers used to include an offensive reference to the *perfidious Jews*, which fortunately, Pope John XXIII removed.

Interpretation of Matthew’s words today can be tricky, in that this Gospel could be wrongly taken as anti-Semitic (as can some statements in John’s Gospel), with the vineyard a common Old Testament metaphor for the Chosen People of Israel, the Jews, God’s favourites back there, as they thought! We have yet another parable on the Kingdom. It can be confusing, as it is rather strong and condemnatory in tone, of those who don’t recognize their own responsibility to produce the good fruit and not expect all the rewards for themselves.

Resentment by the workers is understandable, as absentee landlords were common enough back then in Palestine, and it was the working class who did all the hard labour. No doubt, some landlords would have been exploitative, expecting too much return, without consideration of the needs of the workers. We can therefore understand them being a bit aggrieved, but the point is more that their jealousy leads them to extremes of behaviour, to their own detriment. They were hardly going to gain the inheritance whilst the owner or master was still around! What is more, in this case, he did do some of the early hard yards in setting the whole thing up with planting, the winepress and even a tower, before leasing it out and heading off on holidays or whatever!

Scripture scholar Donald Senior CP suggests: *“The allegory of the vineyard serves Matthew’s Christology by placing Jesus in the context of salvation history. Despite growing bitterness and tension between Matthew’s community and Pharisaic Judaism, the Gospel had not yet fully worked out fully consistent and rigidly clear understanding of the place of Israel in the ongoing history of salvation.”* The theology was still evolving, still is, and no doubt there was friction and misunderstanding on both sides, which has sadly continued, in diverse ways, through the next 2,000+ years of human history! At least today, we have come to understand the fact that faith cannot be imposed or forced on another person, and that respect for the rational beliefs of others is a core value for the Christian who is a true believer. The moral of the story is that the believer is to produce the good fruits through *“good deeds as the guarantor of authentic repentance.”*

As well, there is the ominous foretelling of Jesus’ suffering and death, with the added metaphor of the him becoming the keystone, after rejection in the first place by those in control, noting that Jesus’ words are addressed to the chief priests and elders, who resent him and are out to get him, which they do in the end, sort of!

The words of today’s second reading have Paul summing up the positive attitude for the Christian to take: *“There is no need to worry... asking God with prayer and thanksgiving... Fill your minds with everything that is true... noble... good and pure... everything that we love and honour... that can be thought virtuous or worthy of praise... Then the God of peace will be with you.”* In this way, peace of mind and spirit can be maintained within oneself, as well as in the community in general.

Well, I guess I started with worrying words, but things overall seem to gradually be getting better in time, and hopefully, as the numbers of new infections reduce, we’ll soon be able to gather more freely, as families and friends and for sacramental worship and prayer, presumably in gradual increments!