

Is 5:1-7

Ps 80:9, 12, 13-14, 15-16, 19-20

Phil 4:6-9

Mt 21:33-43

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Tomorrow is the First Monday of October, the day designated in our tradition for the beginning of a new term of the Supreme Court. All the eyes of the nation have been affixed in the last month on the nomination and confirmation process. Everything has been analyzed as never before, and probably as it will be from here on in. Much is at stake and so everyone draws the battle lines.

In this larger national picture it is at times easy to lose sight of the smaller, personal role that each of us has in building a society according to the values of the gospel. What the late John Paul II often referred to as the “culture of life.” The Word of God today, challenges us not to evade that personal level, our own response to the signs of the times.

We hear in the reading from Isaiah about a vineyard that God has indeed planted with loving care because the vineyard is each of us. The Lord has put it in the right place and the right time, he sends the rains and loves his creation. He tills the land and plants the finest seeds. But the prophet says that something is wrong. The vineyard, doesn't turn out well. Probably the one left to continue the work begins well but then indifference or laziness sets in, just letting things go their own way and soon the vineyard is overgrown and produces nothing. Isaiah is saying that we are the vineyard. God gives the gifts, but we must help to ensure that we produce good fruit. If we do nothing, likewise our vineyard becomes overgrown and that is the criticism of Isaiah towards the people of his time, and remains valid for us today. Much more disturbing to this prophet than ambitious plans that go wrong, are the people who do little.

It has been said that “indifference, not hate, is the fabric of inhumanity”, and this echoes perfectly with the message of Isaiah. We can fall into this, and look at the national level and throw there all the attention, and forget that each of us is baptized, each of us has been given gifts to use for building the Kingdom of God, and yet we often fail to do anything, remaining indifferent or simply frozen by being overwhelmed, to advance the cause of life, of justice, of peace.

In the gospel we hear of another vineyard, one that is rented out. The master sends a series of emissaries and none are listened to, rather they are persecuted. Finally the Son is sent, and only receives death. We know that this parable is referring to Jesus himself. The owner is the Father who sends a long list of emissaries (the prophets) but they are not listened to or are silenced. God has not stopped sending his emissaries, which are not always persons, but are special moments of grace that invite us to respond; moments of divine grace which invite us to overcome jealousies, hatreds, gossiping, or indifference in the face of human suffering. At times it is a special moment of time, at times it is a person, or it may be a series of

images that cross our TV screens. God calls us to respond, to not reject his “emissaries”.

This brings us to the reading of Philippians. Here the scripture tells us how we can be and thus accept the mission of bearing fruit. It focuses on the good we can do and the good we can see in others. Certain attitudes make us noble and just, certain ways of looking at others invite us to communion and sharing. In a world and a nation so often divided by inadequate sharing of resources, or divided by political ideologies, or divided by family quarrels, the holy Scriptures asks us to make a difference.

The challenge is indeed large, as it has been since God created that first vineyard. What is clear in today’s readings is that indifference and inaction is not the response that God looks for in light of the many gifts he gives us as individuals and as a nation. We are called to produce the fruit of justice instead of selfishness, of peace instead of war, of communion instead of indifference, of reconciliation instead of rancor, of dialogue instead of shouting with the loudest voice.

God invites us to this mission today. As we hear His Word and eat from his table may we go forth nourished and strengthened to face the challenge of making ourselves and our country ever more “noble, decent and worthy of praise.”