

## 27<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year A – 8<sup>th</sup> October 2023

For the third Sunday running we have a gospel passage that uses vineyards as a metaphor. Although West Berkshire is renowned for many things, probably vineyards would not rank high on the list. Most of us enjoy the fruit of vineyards without having any practical experience of them, but the image is still a relevant one, because we have all planted or nurtured something in expectation of something positive resulting, whether it be garden plants or children. And sometimes, like God, we have been frustrated by the results.

We heard in the first reading today how God planted and lovingly nurtured Israel in his vineyard, waiting in anticipation for His love to yield some fruit. But God is disappointed over and over again. Isaiah uses images of anger – the owner of the vineyard tears down the walls, lets the animals outside trample the vineyard. Jesus says that God will take the kingdom away from Israel and try someone else. The Israelites, like the tenants of the vineyard, have not born fruit and have killed the very messenger sent by God. This is of course, a foreshadowing of the crucifixion.

Each of us has been given all the inner resources we need to get us through life. We have been offered the reign of God, the Kingdom of God. All of it is ours; all of it has been handed over to us. Like the vineyard, we have been lovingly cared for and nurtured. How have we blossomed? Will God be happy with our lives and the fruit we have produced?

Or are we the sour grapes? Do we spend our lives complaining and bemoaning the fact that life is hard, without realizing or appreciating the gifts with which God has tried to nurture us?

The story of the vineyard replays itself over and over again in every generation, because there is always a new crop. Prophets like Isaiah were sent to us not just as examples of ripe, luscious fruit, but also to warn us that we may not be using the gifts God has given to us through our baptism

and confirmation. Every time we encounter a vineyard or grapes in the Bible, it is a reference to the reign of God: The Kingdom of God has been offered to us. What is our response?

Today, God invites us to come and be in the vineyard. What will we do today? Each day is a new day. We may have produced nothing yesterday but what are we doing today? Now? The Kingdom of God is always a 'now' reality. Are we living in God's 'now' reality or are we living in a muddy, infertile environment?

We need to always remember that God keeps inviting us, no matter how many times we reject Him and his gifts. He never stops loving us, caring for us, and inviting us. "I am the vine", he says, "and you are the branches. The vine keeps giving nourishment and life to the branches. We are always connected to God. It is never too late to let the gifts of God blossom through our branches and become the life-bearing fruit that God so wants us to be.