

27th Sunday in ordinary Time Year A

Ferntree Gully Newsletter 2020.

A girl named Kristi Yamaguchi was born to a young couple whose parents had emigrated to the U.S. from Japan in the early twentieth century. Unfortunately, one of her feet was twisted. Her parents tried to heal her by means of physical therapy. To strengthen her legs further they enrolled her in an ice-skating class. Kristi had to get up at four a.m. on school days to do her practice in the ice rink before she went to school. This helped her to develop into a world-class figure-skater. Believe it or not, in 1992 Kristi won the gold medal for the United States in women's figure-skating at the XVI Winter Olympics in Albertville, France, 1992. Kristi thus became one of the several examples of “the stone rejected by the builders becoming a cornerstone” of the U.S. Women’s Olympic team. Kristi is very passionate about making a positive difference in the lives of children. In 1996, Kristi established the Always Dream Foundation whose mission is to encourage, support and embrace the hopes and dreams of children. In today’s Gospel, after telling the parable of the wicked tenants, Jesus prophesies that, rejected by the Jewish nation, he will become the cornerstone of the Kingdom of God.

On this 27th Sunday’s first reading, called, *Isaiah’s Song of the Vineyard*, the prophet describes God’s care of, and expectations for, His Chosen People. God’s Chosen People failed to bear fruit, in spite of the blessings lavished upon them by a loving and forgiving God. Further, they were poor tenants in the Lord’s vineyard. Hence, God laments: “*I expected My vineyard to yield good grapes. Why did it yield sour ones instead?*” In the Responsorial Psalm, the Psalmist pleads with God to look down from Heaven and to “take care of this vine,” knowing that if any good is to come of the vine, it will be God’s doing, not the people. In the second reading, Paul tells Philippians about the high expectations he has for them, reminding them that they need to become fruit-producing Christians by praying and giving thanks to God and by practicing justice, purity and graciousness in their lives.

In the Gospel, Jesus tells an allegorical parable in which the landowner is God, the vineyard is Israel, as God’s special people, and the tenants are the political and religious leaders of Israel. The story emphasizes the failure of the tenants, the Chosen People of God and their leaders, to produce fruits of righteousness, justice and mercy. Giving a theological explanation of Israel’s history of gross ingratitude through the parable, Jesus reminds us Christians that, since we are the “new” Israel, enriched with additional blessings and provisions in the Church, we are expected to show our gratitude to God by bearing fruits of the kingdom, fruits of the Holy Spirit, in our lives, giving Him all the Glory.

Today, we are God’s chosen people. We are the tenants in the vineyard. Now, God calls us to produce the fruits of the Kingdom of God that will endure. How do we see this call? Do we find ourselves specially privileged, by baptism, to be called to work in the Lord’s vineyard? How well, have we received the message of the Lord, when time and again we are invited to gather together to hear the Gospel and to make it part of our lives? Also, it is just as easy for us in these times to fail to recognize the voice of God in the messengers He sends us, just as the Jewish authorities of Jesus’ time failed to recognize the Word of God in him. Over the centuries many prophets in our Christian communities have been rejected, abused and even killed. And all these martyrs have one thing in common - they were killed not by pagans but by fellow-Christians, the tenants in the Lord's vineyard. We can hardly feel superior to the people Jesus is criticizing in today's Gospel.

Again, God is outrageously generous and gracious indeed. But aside from his generosity, another quality of God is revealed in the Gospel parable of today. God values faithful stewardship. Since stewardship is an exercise in responsibility, it follows that God puts premium on our sense of responsibility. We are responsible for our life and for everything else that the Father has entrusted to

us in this life. To be responsible is to be accountable to somebody. The tenants in the Gospel did not want to make accounts with the land owner. They refused to be accountable. They had pretensions at ownership. They wanted to enjoy the bounty of the land without accountability and privileges without obligations.

We are reminded again of what the Scripture says, “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.” The prophets and saints may go unheeded and God’s beloved Son may be rejected, but God has not lost control. Tenants may go on failing, but God does not depend on them. In the face of rejection and sin, he is free to provide other tenants who will produce good fruit. There is surely here an implicit warning for the new leaders of God's people. Leadership must be about service and about nurturing God's people. Christian history has seen its share of failures in moral leadership but it also has no shortage of courageous saints. This weekend therefore, let us all take a few moments to review our status before God, asking ourselves if we will inherit the Kingdom of God. May the grace of God be with each and every one of us as we assess our spiritual status in the eyes of God. And this is the Good News for this weekend. May God bless you all during this tough time.