

## 27th Sunday in Ordinary Time – 2008

I once heard a respected Bible scholar compare the Gospel of Jesus Christ to a mirror. ...He suggested that many people peer into that mirror - the Gospel - and in their reflection they think they see an Apostle, when what they really see is a "jackass."...I'm not sure I would put it quite that way, but I do like to use the "mirror" idea because I believe that as we hear or read the Gospel, it's as if we are looking into a mirror and we see in our reflection what we look like in the eyes of God....Sometimes we look pretty good; other times not so good...In today's Gospel, Jesus tells a parable that He is holding up like a mirror in front of the Jewish religious leaders. ....He wants them to see what they look like in the eyes of God, and what they see is not a pretty picture....He wants them to recognize themselves in the story.

In the parable, the landowner represents God,....and the vineyard stands for the nation of Israel. The tenant farmers are the chief priests and elders, the ones God had entrusted with the spiritual care of His people, His vineyard....The servants sent by the landowner are all the prophets God had sent over the centuries urging the religious leaders and the people to recognize their sin and turn back to God....And the son of the landowner - who is killed by the rebellious tenants - is the Son of God, Jesus himself. ...Using this parable, Jesus holds up a mirror to the religious leaders and says, "This is what you look like to God...You have rejected every messenger He has sent and now you are rejecting me. So the Kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to others to care for it and do with it what God wants."

There's a tendency when we hear a parable like this - clearly aimed at a specific group of people over 2000 yrs ago - that we will say, "Tsk, tsk, isn't it terrible how they acted," and think that it has nothing to do with us...But this parable isn't just about them. It's also about us....We are the others Jesus referred to - the ones who have been given God's Kingdom to care for and to **do with it** what God wants...And so we need to look into today's Gospel –this mirror – to see what we look like in the eyes of God

As we look into this Gospel passage, there are several things we need to notice. First, the vineyard belonged to the landowner – the Master....He had purchased the land, planted the vines, put a wall around it, built the winepress, and put up a watchtower for protection...He had created all of it...The tenants did not own any of it, but they were entrusted with it, to work it, to bring in the crops and produce good fruit in return for what the Master had given them...But instead of being grateful and responsive, they rebelled against their Master....Aren't we in a similar situation?...We have been put on this earth as tenants in God's vineyard...God created the earth and everything in it and has given it to us to use and enjoy and care for....The earth belongs to God...We are its tenants. All of it has been entrusted to our care and keeping and to produce good fruit in return for what God has given to us. This is the great challenge to us in this parable of Jesus....How have we responded; what have we returned to God for all the marvelous gifts of creation He has entrusted to us?...Have we cared for these gifts, protected them, ...used them as God has intended us to use them?

Today, as the Church celebrates Respect Life Sunday, we are especially challenged to look at how we care for and protect the most precious of the gifts entrusted to us: **the gift of life** - every life - the life in the womb - the life of the dying - the life on welfare - the life scrounging through the garbage dump for food - the life on death row - the life of the illegal immigrant- the life of one we love - the life of our enemy – our own life...Every life,...because every life comes from God, has been created in God's own image, has been redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ,...and even if that life has been twisted and corrupted by the world or by the forces of evil,... it still belongs to God, not to you or me or society. ...Yet God has entrusted all life –every life - to our care and protection,...So we need to work and pray for a world in which every life is sacred...every life is valued...every life is safe.

My friends, we believe in Jesus Christ, the one who rose from that grave on Easter morning and overturned the entire Kingdom of death...and established a new Kingdom, a Kingdom of Life...and made us a People of Life...People of Christ are a People of Life...If we stand with Christ, we stand for life, and against whatever destroys life.

Sadly, there is much that destroys human life in our day...and there is nothing that destroys more human life – destroys it on such a large scale – as abortion... A recent Zogby poll showed that a majority of Americans – by more than 2 to 1 - believe that abortion is the taking of a human life....Even Dr. Morris Wortman, Rochester's leading abortionist, acknowledged this in an interview with the Democrat and Chronicle several years ago, in which he also claimed that the taking of that human life was justified. ...Since the Roe vs Wade decision in 1973, our nation has **justified** the taking of almost 50M human lives thru abortion...50M innocent human lives ...eliminated...50M lives that had no choice – had no chance of survival...We're not talking QUALITY of life...we're talking LIFE itself!

There are many people - some of them running for office - who say they're not qualified to judge when human life begins...and science hasn't given any definitive answer...So they can't say when the fetus in the womb becomes a human life...I would ask them this question: if a hunter thinks he sees a deer in the bush, but he's not 100% sure it's a deer and not a human being, should he pull the trigger?... Of course they'd say **NO!** ..Then, I'd say to them, unless we're 100% sure the fetus in the womb is NOT a human life, should we pull the trigger?...If you give human life the benefit of the doubt in one case, then why not the other? Shouldn't we always err on the side of life?

As People of Life, we must reject the false solution of abortion...Abortion doesn't solve anyone's problems...It doesn't solve any of society's problems...As People of Life, we must proclaim that life is the **ONLY** choice for us...because we have accepted Jesus Christ...we have acknowledged that His resurrection from the dead has vanquished the power of death....He has rolled the stone away from the entrance to the tomb....He has done away with death...If He has rolled the stone away...why should we try to roll it back? ...It's not a solution...It's not the way...He has rolled the stone away from the tomb...That means it's time to build policies that affirm life, not that try to use death as a solution to our problems...And it's not only abortion that tries to use death to solve a problem of society.

Death is not a solution to the problem of the suffering and debilitation of a terminal illness. ....Some doctors and ethicists claim that patients with dementia or patients who are in a so-called "persistent vegetative state" are no longer really persons,...and that families should deny them even the most basic forms of nourishment and care...and **pull the plug**...As People of Life, we know God is not calling us to do that...In my work at Rochester General Hospital, I have seen it many times – that, no matter how weak and helpless such patients may be, they have the awesome power to inspire heroic, sacrificial love from their family members and caregivers. I have seen God using them to bring forth goodness and holiness from those who care for them.

And death is not a solution to the problem of crime when we put criminals to death...God is not calling us to do that ...He is calling us to protect life and to affirm that even though one may be entrapped in all kinds of sin, and deceit and evil,...that person can still be redeemed...We must not take refuge in the false solution of death...because it's power has been robbed...by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ...who reigns as King over death...Death is powerless in the presence of our King,...and we should never give that power back to death by using it as a means to resolve any of society's problems...Abortion, euthanasia, assisted suicide, capital punishment, unjust wars, environmental abuses that endanger human life...All of these attacks on human life must be spoken out against and worked against, vigorously, by the People of Life...But the one that cries out loudest to our Christian conscience, ...that demands our response and commitment, is the deliberate, massive attack on the most vulnerable, defenseless, and voiceless members of society: **the unborn.**

My friends, our Creator, our Master, has entrusted His vineyard and all the precious gifts of His creation to our care and protection...none more precious than the gift of Life. And so, we must keep working to change hearts...We must keep raising awareness on **all life issues**...We must keep praying....Preachers must keep preaching LIFE....We need to write letters to the editor. ...We need to contact our law-makers and demand they support only laws that protect human life...or they will lose our vote...We need to support organizations like **Birth Right, Compass Care** and **Women's Care Center**, that counsel and care for pregnant women and their babies,...and **Project Rachel** which counsels and cares for women who have had an abortion – support them not only with our dollars, but with our time and talent...We must stand for life...we must keep working for LIFE...working to protect ALL life... EVERY life. ..May our Lord Jesus Christ give us the strength and courage to do this...AMEN.