

27th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A

Is 5:1-7

Ps 80 *passim*

Phil 4:6-9

Mt 21:33-43

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This 27th Sunday in Ordinary Time brings us deep into the Gospel of Matthew. Of the 28 chapters of the Gospel the passage I've just proclaimed is from number 21. Chapter 21 begins with Jesus's triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. So, we're placed in the very week of Our Lord's passion and death. The religious leaders of the Jewish people, here identified as the chief priests and the elders, are keenly aware of the threat Jesus poses to their power and position. And so, starting last week and ending next week, Jesus has been using parables with the power elite in the hope of reaching their hearts.

Toward the end of the passage Jesus quotes a verse from Psalm 118: "The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; . . ." That stone refers to King David. David started out as a pretty unlikely king. The Bible tells us [*1Sam 16*] that God sent Samuel the prophet to the home of Jesse of Bethlehem to identify the one God had chosen to be king. Jesse had 7 grown-up sons, each one a fine figure of a man. But, Samuel found, God had chosen none of them. So, Samuel inquired after any other sons. Jesse had not even thought about David: David was a young lad, whom Jesse had sent out to tend the sheep. Samuel insisted that David be called in. When Samuel laid eyes on him, God told him that this was the one, this shepherd boy, and Samuel anointed him.

David was a great and glorious king. But when King David was no longer young, did he ever have a doozy of a mid-life crisis! Scripture [*2Sam 11*] tells us that instead of going out to lead his troops into battle, he stayed behind at home, and there he spotted Bathsheba, the beautiful wife of one of his officers, a man named Uriah the Hittite. He lusted after Bathsheba, had his way with her, and got her pregnant. Wanting Bathsheba for himself, he arranged for Uriah, her husband, to die in battle. Bathsheba was allowed to mourn for Uriah, but when her period of mourning ended, King David summoned her to his palace and made her one of his wives.

That's when God sent the prophet Nathan to the royal court. Nathan told King David a story about two men in his kingdom. One was rich and had an abundance of cattle and sheep. His neighbor was poor; all he had was a single sheep, which he loved tenderly and treated like a family pet. When the rich man had to prepare a feast, he stole the poor man's little sheep, had it slaughtered, and served the mutton to his guests.

Nathan's story sent King David into a rage. "Who is this scoundrel?" he thundered. "I shall make him pay dearly for the evil he has done." Nathan pointed his finger at David

and answered, "That man is YOU!" David was first shocked and then ashamed. The story brought home to him what a terrible sin he had committed, and he repented.

Last week Jesus told the chief priests and the elders the story of the two sons. Their father told each of them to go out and work in his vineyard. The one son refused but then changed his mind and did go out to the vineyard. The second son said, "Yes, sir! Right away, sir! I'll get right on that," but never went out. Today Jesus tells about the tenants to whom the landowner entrusted the vineyard he had so painstakingly built and planted. They refused to pay their rent and they killed everyone whom the landowner sent to collect the rent, ultimately even the landowner's own son. Next week we'll hear about the king who prepared a wedding feast to honor his son and about the guests he invited who refused to come. Each of these stories is similar to the story Nathan told King David, with a similar point. Each one is intended to shame the listeners, to melt their cold, hard hearts. In Nathan's case it worked. In Jesus's case it didn't – at least it didn't at the time, not with the chief priests and elders. Whether the stories ultimately have the effect Jesus desired depends on us, the modern-day hearers.

At the end of today's story, Jesus tells the power elite that the kingdom of God will be taken away from them and given to others, who will bear fruit. In the past, some have taken this statement to mean that God has rejected the Jewish people and given their place in salvation history to the Christians. That ignores the Church's teaching, based on St. Paul's Letter to the Romans [11:29], that God's call and gifts are irrevocable; the Jews are still God's chosen people. Besides, if we suppose that God turned his back on the Jewish people, is it not then also the case that God turned his back on the Catholic Church when Martin Luther and the other reformers broke away 500 years ago?

But still, there is a great lesson to be learned: "The kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit." God blesses each community and each individual with a set of gifts and talents that are unique to the recipient. God does not bestow these gifts and talents for the use and enjoyment of the recipients alone or solely for the benefit of each recipient. No, God's gifts are for the sake of his kingdom, for the building up of his kingdom. If we keep the gifts and talents and riches that God has blessed us with, if we keep them for ourselves alone, we let God down, and eventually God will redistribute them until they bear fruit in God's kingdom.

Unlike the chief priests and the elders, let's allow Jesus's stories to touch our hearts. What gifts and talents and riches has God blessed St. Petronille Parish with? What gifts and talents and riches has God blessed Glen Ellyn with? What gifts and talents and riches has God blessed the United States of America with? What gifts and talents and riches has God blessed you with? And what have you done with them?