

Dear Friends,

This morning at Mass (December 16, Third week of Advent) we heard the parable from Matthew 21:28-32 about a man who had two sons. The man asked the two sons to go and work in the vineyard. The first son said no, insinuating he would not go. But later he changed his mind and he went. The second son immediately agreed to go into the vineyard to work, but he too, changed his mind and decided not to go. This parable was an indictment against the chief priests and the Pharisees who refused to hear the preaching of John the Baptist while the tax collectors and prostitutes did listen to John. The sinners were like that first son because they heard the preaching of John and changed their lives while the chief priests and Pharisees did not. The moral of the story is that the sinners would get to heaven before the saints. This is true because the sinners became saints while those who appeared to be the most holy and righteous remained stuck in their sins.

However, there is another underlying message in this parable to which we need to pay attention: it is a message about waiting. We know that Advent is a time of waiting in joyful hope for the coming of Christ. We also look forward to celebrating the birth of Christ. We wait to discover the presence of God in our midst each day. But God is waiting for us too. God waits for us to come to him in the vineyard.

Where is the vineyard? It is where the poor congregate. This is where we find God waiting for us. The father in the parable, who was a wealthy man, called his sons to work in the vineyard with the other vine workers who would have been of a lower caste of people. They would have been day laborers who barely earned enough money to survive each day. It wasn't much of a surprise that each of the brothers was reluctant to go and work in the field all day even though the father needed all the help he could get.

As we wait for the Lord to come into our lives we are called to work in the vineyard with and for the poor. The vineyard is a place of poverty and it is a place of great abundance. The vineyard is a place of poverty because in some way all those who work in it are in need. The vineyard is a place of abundance because it produces a harvest of grapes.

The voice of Christ calls us to work in the vineyard. We hear that call most clearly through our weaknesses, faults and poverty. His voice calls us to change our lives. He calls us to turn away from sin,

especially the sins of pride and greed. Perhaps we do not like to think of ourselves as being impoverished. If, however, we are not aware of our own neediness, it is very difficult for us to hear the voice of Christ.

His voice also calls out to us from those who are truly poor. In this hard economy we are going to be confronted in concrete ways with profound poverty. Some economists think that in the next couple of years there could be approximately eight million homeless people in our country. Think about it. That number is far greater than the total population of the city of Chicago. This recession is going to have an impact on every part of our society. But how will we respond to the plight of the poor? How aware are we going to be of the need to serve those who are going to be out of work, out of money, out food, clothing and shelter?

Our little parable today reminds us that the Father is calling us to work in the vineyard. As the psalmist says, "The Lord hears the cry of the poor." This is because the Lord is one with the poor. In many ways, so are we. In our poverty, though, we hear the good news of God's love as we continue to work in his vineyard.

In joyful hope,
Fr. Tim Seigel