

***FIRST IMPRESSIONS* 27 SUNDAY (A)**

Isaiah 5: 1-7 Psalm 80 Philippians 4: 6-9 Matthew 21: 33-43

By: Jude Siciliano, OP

Dear Preachers:

A woman I know is an editor for a book publishing company. She often remarks that even the best writers need a good editor; someone to read their manuscripts, give feedback to the author and suggest changes. Her job is to read the manuscript making notes in the margins as she goes along, Then she meets with the author to make editorial suggestions. She hopes this input will help the author improve the quality of his or her writing. So, she recommends things like: eliminate this paragraph; this part is too long; cut here, add there; explain this term, etc.

Now the Bible is a great piece of literature and the world's best selling book. I don't think even "Harry Potter" has yet to sell more books. Not yet anyway! Imagine, however, that you were hired as an editor before the separate books of the Bible were assembled and published and your job was to read the text and suggest changes.

No doubt each of us has a story or a line of scripture that we think is impractical, unrealistic or even naive and too idealistic. What about the line about loving our enemies? Turning the other cheek? Forgiving seventy times seven times? Those are hard sayings that we "editors" might like to eliminate, or at least moderate.

I can remember my mother who, early in her marriage to my father, didn't have the modern appliances we now do. My parents had three children and my mother had all the domestic work, which included doing the laundry by hand and then carrying it up to our apartment house roof and hanging it to dry. Rainy weather really messed up her day! When mom heard the Lucan story of Mary and Martha, with Mary sitting at the feet of Jesus listening to him, while her sister was rushing around to do all the work of hospitality, she said to me, "That's one story I would rip out of the Bible!" My mom, the biblical editor. She would have sent the manuscript back to the author with a suggestion in the margins, "Cut this story out. It will infuriate busy and hard working people."

Well, if I were an editor reading today's gospel and had to make it more acceptable to sensible listeners like us, I would cut out the center section of this parable; the

part right after the first servants, who were sent to collect the produce from the vineyard, were seized and killed. I would proceed quickly to the part where Jesus asks the question: "What will the owner of the vineyard do to those tenants when he comes?" I certainly would keep the answer the religious leaders very sensibly gave to Jesus: "The owner will put those wretched men to a wretched death and lease his vineyards to other tenants who would give him the produce at the proper times."

As editor I would suggest to the author, "Cut the part that says, "Again he sent other servants." And for sure eliminate the line, "Finally he sent his son to them." I would advise the author, "These parts will offend a practical hearer. Your story is very unrealistic. Who would be so foolish to send more servants, even a son, into such a dangerous and risky situation? Cutting these verses would make your story far more acceptable."

If we cut these details, we will be left with a sensible and practical story that might suit our world and sound more realistic. But what we would lose is the God Jesus is describing who, even when first rebuffed, keeps coming back to make an appeal to us. A God who keeps inviting us to live more faithful lives in the particular part of the vineyard in which we are called to live the gospel.

Have you noticed in these parables how many of them take place in domestic and "business" settings – at home and the workplace? In today's parable, Jesus speaks of a vineyard. But he is not just talking about agricultural practices, grapes or farm work, is he? Isn't he addressing our daily lives, the work we do and the other places we spend most of our energies – at home, school, supermarkets, the playing field and at our computers?

Isn't he speaking to us about how God is working among the people of our everyday life and at the very places that take up so much of our attention and time? The setting for today's parable is the workplace, a vineyard, and it is there that Jesus invites us to see manifestations of God's reign. In one form or another, work occupies almost all of our waking hours and Jesus is suggesting that the places of commerce and domestic chores may seem to us the least likely places we would expect to encounter God, yet it is these places that Jesus invites us to open our eyes and ears to see God's dynamic presence.

We must be guided in our activities by what we believe: about the value and

dignity of every human being - about the dignity of our own work, our willingness to live our faith by how we act and, when the occasions arise, how we speak about what we believe and what motivates our lives.

We all fall short of the ideals that we profess here each Sunday. Who among us can't claim, "I could do more for God?" Or, "My actions could be more consistent with the faith I profess at church"? Isn't that why we start each Eucharist renewing our desire for mercy and celebrating God's forgiveness. If we did have the job of editing the biblical text, we would be better off leaving the story the way Jesus gives it to us.

Each of us needs the middle section of the story - the part about the additional servants being sent to the rebellious tenants in the vineyard. And we especially need to keep the part about the son being sent to them, because in these essential sections, Jesus is telling us something about God that we need to hear. God doesn't give up on us even when we have turned away from God; God is willing to risk looking foolish in our eyes, willing to come again and again to us. God's love doesn't diminish even when we reject God or live lukewarm lives of faith.

Isn't the reason we come here Sunday after Sunday because we want our lives to reflect the gospel stories we hear? Aren't we grateful that we are given second, third and even more chances to make amends and to renew our resolutions for the coming week, to be more fruitful members of God's family? Most of all aren't we grateful that God sees into our hearts and knows that we want to live good and fruitful lives and so God feeds us at this Eucharist?

SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT

You can help provide a better life for those suffering from the scourge of AIDS in Africa by purchasing a beautiful beaded cross individually handcrafted by a group of **Maasai** women in **Loitokitok**, Kenya under the care of Dominican Sisters from the Philippines.

For more information go to the webpage of the Dominican Friars of Raleigh (<http://www.opraleigh.org/>) and click on our "Kenya Mission" tab.

FAITH BOOK

Mini-reflections on the Sunday scripture readings designed for persons on the run. "Faith Book" is also brief enough to be posted in the Sunday parish bulletins people take home.

From today's Gospel reading:

Finally, the owner of the vineyard sent his son to [the tenants of the vineyard], thinking, “They will respect my son.”

But when the tenants saw the son, they said to one another,

“This is the heir. Come let us kill him and acquire his inheritance.”

They seized him, threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.”

Reflection:

We need middle section of today’s gospel story - the part about the additional servants and the owner’s son being sent to the rebellious tenants of the vineyard. Jesus is telling us something about God that we need to hear. God doesn't give up on us, even when we have turned away from God. God is even willing to risk looking foolish in our eyes, willing to come again and again to us. God's love doesn't diminish, even when we reject God or live lukewarm lives of faith.

So we ask ourselves:

Is there someone in my life who has been a persistent voice urging me to change?

Is it possible in that person’s persistence, God is urging me to make some necessary changes and God is using that person to reach out to me?

JUSTICE BULLETIN BOARD

"My friend had a vineyard on a fertile hillside?"(Isaiah 5:1)

When we picture the “friend” in today’s first reading, most of us probably imagine that it is a *man* who “had a vineyard”. However, in 3rd world countries it is *women* who are often the planters and growers for their families.

“Unfortunately, we are heirs to a history which has conditioned us to a remarkable extent. In every time and place, this conditioning has been an obstacle to the progress of women. Women's dignity has often been unacknowledged and their prerogatives misrepresented; they have often been relegated to the margins of society and even reduced to servitude. This has resulted in a spiritual impoverishment of humanity.” (Letter of Pope John Paul to Women June 29 1995)

Sadly, the continued reality is that women maintain higher rates of poverty despite the fact that the vast majority of the world's work is performed and completed by women. Despite many obstacles, women persevere and often provide the foundation for family life and revitalization of a community.”(Catholic Relief Services) <http://crs.org/>)

Did you know?

1. Self-help groups funded through **micro-loans** provide a wonderful way for groups of women together to improve their lives and those of their families. Many self-help groups foster micro-enterprise, and others promote proper health care, natural disaster preparedness, literacy, and political involvement. The financial gains afforded individuals, families and communities are only part of the picture. These self help groups provide a voice to women, empower women for leadership in their families and communities, and foster kinship between women and the beginnings of equality with men.

What I can do:

Learn about and contribute to one of the many micro-loan organizations which empower women in communities.

- <http://www.crs.org/microfinance/> Catholic Relief Services microfinance program is committed to serving the very poor, especially women and vulnerable populations in remote rural communities.
- www.greenbeltmovement.org The Greenbelt movement is a non-profit organization located in Kenya which hires women to plant trees. The founder of this organization was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004.
- www.KIVA.org is a unique way to choose the entrepreneur to whom you want to offer a small repayable micro-loan.

(Submitted by Anne and Bill Werdel, from the parish bulletin of Sacred Heart Cathedral, Raleigh, NC)

POSTCARDS TO DEATH ROW INMATES

Inmates on death row are the most forgotten people in the prison system. Each week I am posting in this space several inmates' names and locations. I invite you to write a postcard to one or more of them to let them know that: we have not forgotten them; are praying for them and their families; or, whatever personal encouragement you might like to give them. If you like, tell them you heard about them through North Carolina's, "People of Faith Against the Death Penalty." *If the inmate responds, you might consider becoming pen pals.*

Please write to:.....

Keith Wiley	#0654009	(On death row since 5/27/99)
William Anthony	#0654093	(6/3/99)
James Jaynes	#0206197	(6/4/99)
---Central Prison 1300 Western Blvd. Raleigh, NC 27606		

ANNOUNCEMENTS

1. Two new CDs Available: **"FIRST IMPRESSIONS PREACHING REFLECTIONS"** **"Liturgical year A,"** which begins in Advent and contains **three** reflections for almost all the Sundays and major feasts for the year. It also has book reviews and additional essays related to preaching.

"Liturgical years, A, B and C," reflections on the three-year cycle.

If you are a preacher, lead a Lectionary-based scripture group, or are a member of a liturgical team, these CDs will be helpful in your preparation process. Individual worshipers report they also use these reflections as they prepare for Sunday liturgy.

You can order the CDs by going to our webpage: www.preacherexchange.com and clicking on the "First Impressions" CDs link on the left.

2. I get notes from people responding to these reflections. Sometimes they tell how they use "First Impressions" in their ministry and for personal use. Others respond to the reflections, make suggestions and additions. I think our readers would benefit from these additional thoughts. If you drop me a BRIEF note, I will be happy to add your thoughts and reflections to my own. (Judeop@Juno.com)

3. Our webpage: <http://www.preacherexchange.com>

Where you will find "Preachers' Exchange," which includes "First Impressions" and "Homilias Dominicales," as well as articles, book reviews and quotes pertinent to preaching.

4. "Homilias Dominicales"-- these Spanish reflections are written by three friars of the Southern Dominican Province, Jose David Padilla, OP, Wilmo Candanedo, OP and two Dominican sisters, Regina Mc Carthy, OP and Doris Regan, OP. Like "First Impressions", "Homilias Dominicales" are a preacher's early reflections on the upcoming Sunday readings and liturgy. So, if you or a friend would like to receive "Homilias Dominicales" drop a note to John Boll, O.P. at: Jboll@opsouth.org or jboll@preacherexchange.org

5. "First Impressions" is a service to preachers and those wishing to prepare for Sunday worship. It is sponsored by the Southern Dominican Province, U.S.A. If you would like "First Impressions" sent weekly to a friend, send a note to John Boll at the above Email address.

DONATIONS

If you would like to support this ministry, please send tax deductible contributions to Jude Siciliano, O.P., whose address is listed below. Make checks to: Dominican Friars of Raleigh. Or, go to our webpage to make an online donation: <http://www.preacherexchange.com>
Thank you.

Blessings on your preaching,

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