

Twenty-seventh Sunday of Ordinary Time

Dear Parishioners and friends,

Most of us will have experienced disappointment at some time in our lives. Something we put effort into did not work out as we had hoped. More often than not, it is other people who disappoint us. We invest something of ourselves in people. We have some expectations of them on the basis of that. They let us down. Most of us learn to live with that experience of being disappointed by others. The realisation that we ourselves have probably disappointed others many times may help us to accept others who disappoint us. It can happen, however, that the repeated experience of disappointment can leave us discouraged and disheartened. We retreat into ourselves and settle for less. We become slow to trust and disinclined to give too much. Learning to deal well with the experience of disappointment in ways that do not diminish us is one of the tasks and challenges of life.

The first reading and the gospel reading today shine a light on the experience of disappointment. In the first reading, a vineyard owner is disappointed by his vineyard. In spite of generous investment of work and resources on his part, the vineyard offered him back sour grapes instead of good grapes. Although the parable Jesus relates also focuses on the disappointment of a vineyard owner, the experience of disappointment it explores is much more traumatic and painful. Here the disappointment it explores is much more traumatic and painful. Here the disappointment of the landowner is not with his land but with the people to whom he entrusted his land. Not only do the tenants not offer him the produce of the land, they maim and kill the messengers he sent in his name, including his own son. The story Jesus tells has a sinister element not present in the sad song that Isaiah sings. The sad song and the story of betrayal and murder both give expression to God's disappointment with his people.

God has invested heavily in us. God has given us his Son and has poured the Spirit of his Son into our hearts. Yet, the first reading and gospel reading bring home to us the uncomfortable truth that our lives do not always bear the kind of fruit that such an investment has a right to expect. We do not always fulfil God's hopes for us. Where does that leave us? I suggest it leaves us on our knees asking God to help us open our hearts to the many gifts God is always giving us, so that those gifts can shape our lives and make of them a gift to God and God's people. The conviction that God remains faithful to us even after we have disappointed him many times does not leave us complacent. Rather, this conviction keeps fresh our desire to live lives that are full of the fruit of the Holy Spirit. It encourages us to keep seeking the Lord whose power at work within us can do immeasurably more than we can ask or imagine.

Father Patrick