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## **A homily for the 27th Sunday in Ordinary Time**

**Date:** Sunday, October 8, 2017 | **Season:** Ordinary Time after Easter | **Year:** A

**First Reading:** Isaiah 5:1–7

**Responsorial Psalm:** Psalm 80:9, 12–16, 19–20 | **Response:** Isaiah 5:7a

**Second Reading:** Philippians 4:6–9

**Gospel Acclamation:** John 15:16

**Gospel Reading:** Matthew 21:33–43

**Preached at:** the Holy Trinity Catholic Church in Braamfontein **in the** Archdiocese of Johannesburg, South Africa.

During the week we celebrated World Teachers Day and I'd like to ask for your prayers for all of our teachers in Catholic Schools, and indeed, all our schools in our country. They deserve our thanks and our prayers for their dedication and work in preparing our future. Of course we hope they always strive to do their best, but we must thank and honour them today. And let not forget all lecturer's and professor's who also teach – though in a different way – their vocation must also be celebrated.

Jesus was also a teacher – and I hope for many of our teachers, especially in Catholic Schools, he is the model teacher! Today we hear another one of his parables. Sadly – for many years in the Church's history this Gospel has been misinterpreted – or rather – taught badly. For some reason, some people thought – "Aha! Jesus has taken the vineyard away from the Jews and given it to us Christians!" This would be a mistaken understanding.

We need good teachers to explain things properly. Without people dedicated to the truth, twisted ideologies are able to appear reasonable. We must guard against any form of anti-semitism when understanding today's Gospel.

Because it's very tempting to think that this Gospel was meant for the prophets of the Old Testament and the Jewish people more generally – but then we would be making the same mistake that the Chief Priests and the Elders made in the Gospel, thinking it was about other people too. But today's parable, my brothers and sisters, is about us. How have we received the Good News? What are we doing?

Because it is not the vineyard that is replaced – but rather the tenants (the leaders and teachers of the people) who are replaced by the householder. Let's remember that the vineyard is God's people and what God wants from us is justice and goodness but what he finds is violence and bloodshed and the anguished cry of the poor and the oppressed. In the Lord's vineyard, the key issue is about how do we bear "good fruit". This is another agriculturally familiar biblical image for living in faithful obedience to God's will – for keeping God's commandments and living the kind of life that St Paul in our second reading says frees us from anxiety and assures us of peace.

We can become so used to saying "The peace of the Lord be with you" during the Mass that we lose a sense of its meaning. Peace is the opposite of Anxiety. The reading from Philippians invites us to consider what God's peace means for our lives in such an anxious age. And we do live in a very anxious age in South Africa. The uncertainty and anxiety associated simply with unemployment and political disappointment is a huge scourge for our country. Our leaders too, should surely ask themselves what kind of fruit have they borne for the country that has been entrusted to their care.

We need to pray that our leaders model more of their lives on Jesus; that they take him as an example and learn to bear good fruit by offering 'prayer and supplication with thanksgiving'; by being honest and honorable; pure and just; lovely and gracious.

This will be more possible if we have teachers who teach our children critical skills – so that they are not taken in by Fake News or propaganda, but see the truth – or increasingly in our case, the ugliness – of the situation – and are able to commit themselves to working towards bearing good fruit again, as the Lord commands.

In creating us in his own image and likeness, God has made us free. He has given us a capacity to choose what is good. This is an ability to love not only created reality but God who created that reality in the first place. Fundamentally our teachers need to teach our children how to choose good over evil. And all of us need to commit to making that choice again and again in our lives. The last few verses of the second reading sum up the kind of fruit that God wants us to bear in our lives. It flows in large degree from who we are as human beings, from our social nature, from our responsibility for ourselves, our families, our cities and nations. To be alive at all is to be called to make a difference in the world, to contribute something to its betterment, to be honest and just, considerate and caring. To bear good fruit.

A simple lesson I learned at school which has never left me was this: “Have I left a place better than I found it?”

As Christians who have accepted in faith the gospel of Christ, we are called to keep alive its memory, to celebrate its reality, and to bear witness in our lives to its saving power. In our second reading we hear that it is through prayer and the eucharist – which means ‘thanksgiving’ – as well as through committed service to those in need, that we bring forth the fruits of the kingdom.

I think we do this fairly well at Holy Trinity – or at least we actively try to. Throughout the week people come to Holy Trinity to pray and to do good works. But perhaps we are not as full of peace as we might want. Many of us remain anxious.

Today let us allow the Peace of Christ to come into our hearts. St Paul says in today’s readings that no matter what our situation or our failing is, if we can but turn in prayer to God we will experience again that peace of God that goes be-

yond all understanding, that peace that has become theirs through Jesus Christ, whose teaching and example we should constantly imitate. Most especially, let us learn from this parable, wherein we see God's mercy, and his desire for us all to grow and bear fruit, the good fruit that will last and will sustain us for eternal life.

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