

Go Forth...

A SERVICE OF U.S. CATHOLIC MISSION ASSOCIATION

MISSIONARY COMMENTARY

THE GOSPEL AND FRANCIS



SUNDAY READINGS:

Isaiah 5:1-7

Psalms 80:9, 12-16, 19-20

Philippians 4:6-9

Matthew 21: 33-43

COMMENTARY

I am torn this month between two themes that are dear to my heart: the Gospel message of confronting our unfaithfulness and believing in the mercy and love of God and of today's feast, that of St. Francis of Assisi. (After all, I am a Franciscan Sister of the Sacred Heart!) I can reconcile these thoughts because St. Francis

wanted only one thing and that was to live the Gospel life. When the Pope asked him to write a rule for his new brotherhood, all Francis wrote were a few passages from the Gospels. However, when the cardinals read what Francis wrote, they claimed that it was not a good rule, because no one would be able to live it!

To many people Francis is the saint of animals. He is depicted with birds on his shoulder, a wolf at his feet, and perhaps even running through a field of wild yellow flowers. No doubt Francis' connection with creation could have included all of these images and perhaps even more. But this connection was based on Francis' belief that all creation spoke to him of God and God's love. After his conversion from being a merchant's son to a man totally dedicated to a loving God, Francis realized that he was loved and forgiven by God, his father, and called by Jesus, his brother to spread God's love to all people.

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As he grew in this understanding, he also grew in establishing relationships with all living things and not only people. Hence he wrote, Brother Sun, Sister Moon, Brother Wind and Sister Water. As he gazed on the San Damiano cross in a broken chapel in ruins in the woods, he felt the call to be God's troubadour in the world. Although he considered himself nothing more than a worm, he never doubted God's love for him. Never.

And God rewarded him for this by blessing him with the stigmata. For two years he suffered as Jesus suffered and he actually asked to know two things in his life: to know the love of God as Jesus did; and to suffer the pain that Jesus did. He did not fear in asking this from God.

So, what would Francis say about today's Gospel? He would say that he was the worse sinner but that God in his mercy and love could save him. That our conversion has to come from our hearts. We have to repent from our unfaithfulness and allow God to shower us with love and grace then, and only then can we experience true happiness. Francis would say that we must recognize all peoples as our sisters and brothers because we all have just one Father. And he would say like St. Paul, "peace be with you." If don't know too much about St. Francis, just Google it!

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NOTES ON THE SUNDAY READINGS:

First Reading: Isaiah 5:1-7

The prophet Isaiah speaks in a parable much as Jesus did when he was teaching the people. The friend is God who prepared the land so that the vines would grow and produce many grapes. The land represents the Israelite people who God had prepared to receive the covenant and truly become God's people, but the people were unfaithful and produced only wild grapes. This reading is worth reflecting on in your life and mine. God has given us so much in love and mercy. Do we respond with that same love and mercy? Are we God's people?

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 80:9, 12-16, 19-20

This psalm speaks of what the prophet Isaiah has just told us. But the psalmist recognizes the unfaithfulness that has been practiced by the people. The powerful words, "Once again, O Lord of hosts, look down from heaven, and see; take care of this vine,..." In spite of our failures we beg God to take care of us, to be merciful to us, and we are never disappointed because God will always seek us and bring us back to God's love.

Second Reading: Philippians 4:6-9

This wonderful and encouraging letter of St. Paul reminds us of who God is for us. We need not be anxious because all of our efforts to be the people that God desires of us, can be a reality if we act as God inspires us to be. Then peace will reign in our hearts.

Gospel: Matthew 21: 33-43

The parable of the vineyard continues in the Gospel as Jesus exhorts the chief priests and the elders hundreds of years after Isaiah had spoken similar words to the people of his time. Jesus' rendition is even more powerful because he speaks of the son of the vineyard owner. The reference, of course, is of himself and what will become of him. The words had fallen on many deaf ears in Jesus' time, and we must be careful that the same not happen to us.

Notes and Commentary by Sr. Nancy Schramm, OSF. Sr. Nancy is a past-president of the USCMA and currently serves in a small rural parish. She also serves her religious community on various committees. She is a spiritual director and translates for other groups in Portuguese.

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