

27th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Homily Based on Is 5, 5-7; Phil 4, 6-9; Mt. 21:33-43

“Business as usual... business as it should be concerned about the welfare of the others... for we are simply tenants; God is still the owner of the vineyard.”

This Sunday, I invite you to reflect on the conduct of business because the parable of the vineyard is, after all, talking about business. At the time of Jesus, there were no huge commercial buildings and manufacturing corporations. What the people had then were vast tracts of agricultural lands, such as vineyards. Having a large vineyard means big business. Like our Lynds Fruit Farm here. Recently My Provincial Superior from India was here, and I took him to Lynds. He was surprised to see plenty of apples had fallen unwanted. I was trying to explain to him that farming here is not just Agricultural, but it is a business and so though plenty are fallen they still make so much profit out of it.

But nowadays we know that business is not good, even in wealthy countries like here in United States or Europe. The entire world is undergoing global economic crisis. This is greatly worsened by the current pandemic worldwide. Even big economies are in severe financial troubles. Perhaps we can relate the Gospel lesson with the concrete economic situation of the world.

God has abundantly blessed this world with many and varied gifts, especially natural and human resources. In fact, this world is the wonderful vineyard of the Lord. But why is this vineyard becoming a wasteland? There is pollution everywhere, forests are denuded, the seas and waterways are poisoned, and the natural resources are abused and are on the brink of extinction. Most of the calamities, therefore, that have

wreaked havoc all over are man-made. And even the economic system of the world, due to man's unbridled greed, has undergone drastic changes that have disastrous consequences on the lives of people.

The parable this Sunday identifies these changes. First, the Hedge or walls are gone. These walls are supposed to keep harmful wolves and animals away from the vineyard. Such are the negative effects of free trade and globalization that have taken down the protective walls of each country and made them open and vulnerable to the unmitigated influx of criminal and immoral activities in their economy.

Second, the wine press or vat is gone. It is built inside the walls of the vineyard so that at vintage time the pressing of the grapes will be done within its walls. And again, invoking globalization and succumbing to the desire for more profits, big business corporations opted to close their domestic operations and outsourced their production to other countries outside in order to get much cheaper labor and windfall profits. This results in huge capital flight and loss of jobs to millions of workers. The rise in unemployment further weakens the people's buying capacity, consequently resulting in the steep drop in sales of products and services.

Third, the watchtower is also gone. It was put up as the guardhouse of the vineyard so that any danger will be averted. But uncontrolled private enterprise and corporate greed have eradicated all administrative safeguards and monitoring systems, again in the guise of free trade. This was one major factor in the economic collapse of many countries.

And fourth, the tenants, blinded by greed and selfishness, choose to turn against the owner of the vineyard, killing his servants and even his own son. God is the

landowner of the vineyard. He is still the owner of this world and everything in it. We are only His tenants and we are expected to give an accounting of our stewardship to Him in the end. Unfortunately, many people ignore this, and instead want to be the owners and landlords. And so, they try to kick God out as well. They do not realize that, a vineyard without the Lord surely becomes a wasteland: “Unless the Lord build the house, they labor in vain who build. Unless the Lord guard the city, in vain does the guard keep watch” (Ps 127:1).

The words “In God We Trust” may as well become “In Gold We Trust”! Many people trust more in their money and gold, than in God. And worse, there are those who are bent on eradicating God from the Constitution, from the schools and from all public places. These are systematic attempts to erase God from society! This is what is truly frightening, for we all know there is no real freedom and success without God! Let us remember late President Ronald Reagan’s Words, “If we ever forget that we're one nation under God, then we will be a nation gone under.”

The truth of this statement is there for us all to see: wars, mass murder of children in schools, killing of unborn babies, rampant immorality and amorality, graft and corruption, terrorism and countless evil acts brought about by man’s unbridled greed and the culture of death. And then, people ask: ‘Where is God? Does God ever care?’ They do not realize that God never abandons His people. It is they who kicked God out of their societies in the first place.

Needless to say, the cause of all the troubles that the world undergoes now is man’s rejection of God due to his selfishness and greed. St. Paul, in his Letter to the Philippians, said, “Their end is destruction! Their god is their stomach; their glory is in their ‘shame’. Their minds are occupied with earthly things” (Phil 3:19).

The Gospel this Sunday invites us to bring back the true meaning of business, that is, business as usual, business as it should be. Since last one year I have been studying American English Accent and pronunciation. So, I have noticed, the letters of the word “business” give us important lessons. In “business”, it is not all about the “I”; rather, “U” and “I” are in it. In fact, the “U” comes before the “I”, and the “I” is silent. And finally, the “U” is pronounced as “I”. In other words, in dealing with business, we should be concerned about the welfare of the others. In the end, we also benefit from serving others. Ignoring these lessons, as what is happening nowadays, will invariably result in severe injustice and more human misery.

And so, dear friends, in this Mass, let us resolve to observe the real purpose of business. Let us renew our loyalty and obedience to God in all our human endeavors. Let us acknowledge that we are simply his tenants; he is still the owner of the vineyard. May the words “In God We Trust” be forever engraved in our hearts and in the entire human society.