



October 8, 2023

## 27<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time

*Take care of this vine and protect what your right hand has planted.*

*Psalm 80:15-16*



Dear Friends;

One of my shortcuts to get to Byron is Hoffman Lane. Along the way there used to be a large walnut grove. I loved the stately trees. There was dense foliage for shade in the summer. I also loved to see the shape of the branches on the bare trees in the winter. One day I drove by and almost all of them were knocked down by bulldozers. I knew that soon they would all be gone.

I was having dinner at the home of one of our families. The farmer to whom the walnut orchard belonged was also invited. I told him I was sad to see the walnut trees gone. He said he was sad to let them go. He said the house used to be hidden by those trees. Now they feel a little exposed. But the market forces that drive commercial farming necessitated the removal of those trees. They were old and not producing many walnuts. They needed to replace them with row crops which were a better financial return. I said *"I get it but it still makes me sad."*

Today the reading from Isaiah tells us the story of a vineyard owner. He had land on a fertile hillside. He plants grapes. He loves them and tends them. He builds a wall to protect them from livestock that might ravage them. But when he went to look for grapes the yield was only sour, wild grapes. The owner must have felt very sad. But he gives the field over to another use. He breaks down the wall and give it over to grazing animals.

This story is an allegory. God is the vineyard owner. The people of Israel are the vines he planted. He gives them all they need to produce the fruit of mercy and loving-kindness. But sadly, it did not happen. Isaiah uses the destruction of the vineyard to speak about what happens when Judah was conquered, Jerusalem and the Temple destroyed, and the people were exiled. It was all very sad.

Despite this, God will be able to bring good where there was destruction. It was in the exile that the Hebrew Testament took shape. In the Exile a lay movement centered on the community, synagogues, were born. Lay-teachers would instruct the people on the law, the prophets, and right observance. Jesus came out of this movement.

Jesus will take this image of the vineyard and add tenant farmers to speak of the failed leadership of the chief priests and elders of the people. The owner waits for his share of the crop. When he sends his representatives to collect what is his they beat and kill them. Finally, he sends his son. They miscalculate and think if they get rid of the son, they could have it all. This certainly refers to what happens to the prophets and Jesus, the Son. His listeners predict a bad end for those tenants in the story, but the mercy of God has another plan.

Pope Francis said, *"God's disappointment at the wicked behavior of humankind is not the last word! This is the great novelty of Christianity: a God who, even though disappointed by our mistakes and our sins, does not fail to keep his Word, does not give up and, most of all, does not seek vengeance!"* God takes the stones thrown down and constructs a new wall and vineyard that will produce the *"new wine"* of mercy. We can be that wine if we let God's love work on us. We are invited to taste God's mercy, if we refuse God will invite others. It's up to us.

Peace,

*Fr Ron*

*Esta carta está en español en el sitio web: [www.anne.church](http://www.anne.church)*