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# It takes leadership to transform the world

Thomas Gumbleton | Oct. 6, 2011 The Peace Pulpit

When we reflect on the Scriptures today, especially the Gospel lesson, it will not be very helpful for us unless we remind ourselves of the context in which this Gospel lesson, this parable, is told by Jesus.

Remember last week, Jesus had been challenged by the chief priests, the Pharisees, the leaders, "By what authority are you doing these things?" They were talking about the things Jesus had done. First of all there was that event that we all recall so clearly where he goes into the Temple and finds the buying and selling going on, the cheating of the people and the corruption, and he overturns the tables of the buyers and sellers, driving them out.

Twenty-sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Isaiah 5:1-7

Psalm 80:9, 12, 13-14, 15-16, 19-20

Philippians 4:6-9

Matthew 21:33-43

Full text of the readings [1]

He cries out, "You have made the House of God a den of thieves." That upset the chief priests and Pharisees, as you can imagine.

They were also upset because Jesus had continued to teach in the Temple area, teaching his message of love and his message for the need for reform, his message of reaching out as he did, not only in word but in action, to the rejected, the prostitutes and sinners that we were told about in last week's Gospel.

In that context, Jesus tells the second parable, but now, when he tells about the vineyard, the chief priests, the scribes, the Pharisees, and the religious leaders would have remembered immediately the beautiful song that we heard in our first lesson today, proclaimed by the Prophet Isaiah.

"Let me sing for my beloved the love song of my beloved about his vineyard. My beloved had a vineyard on a fertile hillside." Isaiah describes how carefully the owner of that vineyard took care of it. He dug it up, cleared the stone, and planted the choicest vines, but then the vineyard produced nothing but rotten fruit.

The key part of that first lesson today about the song concerning the vineyard is at the end when Isaiah says, "The vineyard of Yahweh's solemn oath is the people of Israel." The people of Judah are God's pleasant vine.

God had looked for justice, but found bloodshed and violence.

He had looked for righteousness, but heard cries of distress.

The poor were being neglected.

The widowed, the orphaned, the stranger and the immigrant were not being treated with love and so that vineyard, God's people, were failing what God was asking of them.

Now, in the Gospel lesson, Jesus tells this parable and he wants those who hear, the scribes and the Pharisees, to realize. They do very quickly.

At the end of the parable, Jesus asks the question, "What will the owner of the vineyard do with the tenants when he comes?" They know. They say to him, "He will bring those evil men to an evil end and lease the vineyard to others who will pay in due time."

They recognize that Jesus is talking about them, the religious leaders who oppose Jesus. So the parable points to the necessity of new leadership. They recognize that very clearly. The leaders become hardened in their determination to get rid of Jesus, but they don't do it immediately because of the crowds of people around.

The point is very clear. They understand by that parable that new leadership is to come. Jesus is proclaiming a message that they do not want to hear. Over history, over the centuries, there have been changes of leadership in the Jewish community.

Those who had determined to follow Jesus, the community of disciples of Jesus which is Matthew's community to whom this message is being proclaimed, would also apply it to themselves and to the leadership in the church.

Obviously they did at that time, but this message is for us today also.

It's one that our church needs to hear if we're not producing the righteousness and the justice, making the Reign of God break forth in our world.

As we know, the mission that God has given to the community of disciples is to transform our world into as close an image of the Reign of God as possible.

It takes leadership to do this. So this message is proclaimed now to the Christian community, to our community.

All of us have some roles of leadership in our church. In our families, parents have roles of leadership. In our educational systems, there are teachers or those who lead our religious education programs who have roles of leadership. The ministers in parishes have roles or leadership. There is lay leadership. The bishops are in roles of leadership.

What Jesus is saying in this parable, all of us need to begin to say to ourselves, "Are we carrying out faithfully the role of leadership that is given to me?"

Again, I insist that all of us are adult members within the community of disciples of Jesus. We all have roles. Paul puts it in terms that various gifts are given to different people, but all of us have some part to play in making the Reign of God happen and transforming our world.

So we ask ourselves today, am I doing what I need to do within my family, within my community, within my parish community? I guess one of the things that occurs to us right away is how drastically we need leadership at the level of bishops in our church.

We still haven't dealt adequately with what John Paul called that terrible cancer within the church, the sex abuse scandal. The leaders who allowed that to happen are still functioning in our church, so we have to call for change in that leadership and demand of our church that our bishop leaders be held accountable so that at some point that evil can be rooted out of our community of disciples.

It won't be easy for any of us to look honestly at ourselves and see how we are or are not fulfilling, or perhaps failing in whatever role of leadership is given to us.

It will not be easy to bring about the kind of changes in our leadership of the bishops, the ordained leadership of our church, but we can't give up.

We have to do what Paul says in our second lesson today. "Remember, the Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything. The Lord Jesus will be with you until the end of time and nothing will be able to destroy My Church," Jesus told us.

God is near. Jesus is near.

Paul says, "In everything, resort to prayer." That's where we start. Look into our hearts. See what's going on there that we need to change. Pray about it. Reflect on it.

Paul says, "Then the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." Now when we can do that, pray in such a way that our hearts and minds are in Christ Jesus, connected with Him, we will find ourselves being changed.

We will find that we will work more ardently and effectively to bring about change in whatever parts of the church need to be reformed. Leadership of the bishops can be changed also and become the effective leaders we need as we really work to hold our bishop leaders accountable within our church.

This will take not just the prayer that Paul talked about. That prayer will help us to see the way, but then we will also need to do what Paul says at the end. "Finally, brothers and sisters, fill your minds with whatever is truthful, holy, just, lovely and noble. Be mindful of whatever deserves praise and admiration. Put into practice what you have learned from me, what I pass on to you."

Begin to act on what you have learned in your prayer. Act for change within yourself, within whatever community you are part of in our civil society and in our church.

Act for change among the ordained leadership of our church. When we put into practice what we have learned, then the God of Peace will be with us. This vineyard, God's vineyard, our church, will continue to grow, to change, and to be the source of good in the world that God intended it to be.

I urge all of us today to listen carefully to what Jesus tells us in this parable and commit yourself to the kind of conversion and change that is needed.

Work for that change in our society and in our church.

[This homily was given at St. Leo Parish in Detroit, Mich.]

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