

## Twenty-seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time “Share the Journey”

Extreme violence is how the prophet Isaiah describes the vineyard owner’s response to the wild grapes that grew in his vineyard after all his hard work. There is even more violence in the Gospel parable. Not only do the tenants inflict violence, but the chief priests and elders to whom Jesus addresses the parable call for a wretched death for those wretched men. They respond to violence with more violence. But stories of violence are not what we look forward to when we come for Sunday Mass. We come to praise God, to find peace for our hearts, and be inspired to witness God’s love in the world. These stories of violence do not fulfill that hope; when we think about it, neither do these stories threaten us. They are just stories from the past. We are here together in peace. We can share in the Eucharist and be strengthened for the journey of life. We can return to our homes in safety.

But throughout the world, in Africa, the Middle East, Southeast Asia, Central America, and right here in the United States, there are millions of people who have fled their homes, their countries, their whole way of life— to find safety from violence. For them, violence is not a biblical story from the past. It is an ever-present reality, overwhelming their lives. They flee for all sorts of reasons: to get away from civil wars, to avoid having their daughters seized for the sex trade and their sons taken to serve as laborers or soldiers in tribal armies. They flee multi-year droughts that leave them without food and hope for their families. They flee ethnic and religious oppression. They flee to find work to support their families. They flee environmental disasters and lawlessness. They are exposed to brutality daily. Many long to return to their homes. But until these are safe places, they know they need to go elsewhere. Whether they have fled to another part of their own country or to another country altogether, they are at the mercy of strangers, who probably speak a different language. They live with fear in their hearts. Who will take them in? How will they be received, if they do find a new home?

These are the people throughout the world that Pope Francis embraces and holds close to his heart. These are the people he has gone to visit where they have landed on safe shores. These are the people he has provided shelter for in Rome. These are the people whom he challenges us to embrace and hold close to our hearts. In doing so I think he is listening to the last verses in today’s reading from Isaiah and in the Gospel. Isaiah proclaims that the Lord of hosts rejects the

bloodshed and the outcry, the violence, and calls for right judgment and justice from his people, to live in God's peace. Likewise, at the end of the Gospel we just heard, Jesus rejects the violence of the chief priests and elders against the violent tenants in the parable. Jesus promises that the kingdom of God, the loving presence and gracious power of our God, will be given to people who produce its fruit, the fruit that is life and hope for all.

Just over a week ago, Pope Francis, launched a 2-year campaign to reach out to the refugees and migrants of the world. He is calling on Catholics, Christians, people of other religions and people of goodwill to work together for the good of our sisters and brothers throughout the world who have fled their homes in desperation. He invites us, here in the United States, to consider how Jesus would expect us to respond to these desperate children of God and share their journey. Because of the many conflicts in the world, we are sometimes inclined to see the world around us with fear for our own safety and security. All too often we see threats. The Holy Father is asking us to reconsider our ways of thinking about and of responding to refugees and migrants.

There are many opportunities for us to respond to Christ's call to love our neighbor and share the journey of immigrants and refugees in our country and around the world. We can support efforts to provide food and shelter in the camps around the world where they have taken refuge. We can join local efforts to support people here in our community or nearby. You can learn more about how each of us can respond to the Holy Father's request in our bulletin and social media.

To conclude, I would like to share these words from Pope Francis from earlier this year:

"Each person is precious; persons are more important than things, and the worth of an institution is measured by the way it treats the life and dignity of human beings, particularly when they are vulnerable ...." [15 January 2017]).

These words are particularly relevant for us now, during Respect Life Month, as we remember that our Catholic faith upholds the life and dignity of all people. May the words and actions of our Holy Father in imitation of Jesus inspire us in the days, weeks and months ahead to expand the reach and range of our hearts to those who are calling out for our help. Let us "Share the Journey"!