

[Spirituality](#)



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To reflect on today's Scriptures, I think it is helpful if we remember what we have been reflecting on for the last couple of weeks, and that has been about the profound conversion, which each one of us must undergo if we are really to be a disciple of Jesus. That conversion is to be converted to the very way of God shown to us in Jesus. A couple of weeks ago, you may remember that we had a passage in the prophet Isaiah where the prophet was saying about God, "My ways are not your ways; my thoughts are not your thoughts. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are my ways above your ways and my thoughts above your thoughts."

Twenty-seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

Isaiah 5:1-7

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

Philippians 4:6-9

Matthew 21:33-43

[Full text of the readings](#)

If we're going to be converted to the way of God, it will mean profound change in our way of thinking, in our way of acting, in our way of life to truly follow God's ways that are not our ways. Just a week ago we heard earlier in the letter of St. Paul to the church at Philippi where Paul is describing Jesus and urging us as he says, "Have this attitude in you which was in Christ Jesus." If we're going to be converted, have the attitude, the thinking, the way of Jesus. He goes on to say, "Who, though he was God, did not think his divinity was something to be clung to, but emptied himself and became human, fully human, giving himself over to death, even the death on the cross. In the process of that dying, continuing to love those putting him to death."

Have this mind in you, which was in Christ Jesus. Doesn't that require deep change in our ways of thinking? Today's lessons follow up on this. First of all, in the first lesson, the prophet Isaiah in singing this hymn about a vineyard, which he identifies is really God's people, and he writes or sings about how God loved this vineyard, loved it first and nurtured it, cared for it. That vineyard represented the people. That's how God loves us; God loves us first. We don't earn God's love. No, God loves us and then in response, we try to love God by being like God.

Of course, in that first lesson the vineyard produced rotten fruit. The people were not faithful to this God who loved them. In the Gospel lesson, Jesus is teaching the same kind of thing. He talks to the leaders about how there was this person who had a vineyard that was very valuable. He leased it out to tenants who began to rob him. The vineyard owner sends messengers to collect what is his. They beat them and kill them and take the fruits of the vineyard for themselves.

Then imagine (it seems so foolish), after they've killed the previous messengers on two occasions, the owner says, "I'll send my son. Surely they'll respect my son." But of course, they killed him too. Can't you see the leaders of the Jewish people at this time, the religious leaders, knowing and realizing as Jesus is speaking this parable, he's talking about them because they already had plans to kill him, the Son. Within a week they would torture and murder him. Again though, the extraordinary love of God where God, through Jesus, even as he's dying on the cross prays, "Father, forgive them."

Notice in the first lesson, the prophet Isaiah, where he found fault with the people who didn't care about the vineyard said, "God was looking for justice, but found bloodshed. God was looking for justice, but heard cries of distress." It was violence that God was trying to overcome. The same thing is true in the Gospel where Jesus points out how they say, "This is the one who is to inherit the vineyard. Let us kill him." Violence — that's what Jesus is warning us against. The people in the Old Testament failed. The people in the time of Jesus failed. And yet God still is waiting to be gracious to us, to forgive us.

I think it would be very obvious to all of us how timely this message is that our deep conversion has to be a conversion away from violence. We live in a culture of violence. Look at what just happened where 58 people were shot to death. That's only the most recent and the worst of these kinds of tragedies. This kind of violence is going on in our country constantly because we have a country that is committed to a culture of violence. Everyone must have a gun! If they strike me I'll kill them!

That's the message, but it's not the message of Jesus. We have to know that. We have to try to understand that. We have to try to be converted to the message of Jesus. That message is spelled out so clearly in his words, "Don't just love those who love you, love your enemies. Do good to those who hurt you." It's an extraordinary call and it requires profound conversion to really follow Jesus. But isn't that what he did when he was dying on the cross?

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When the guards were about to capture him and one of his disciples took up a sword to defend him. Don't you have a right to defend yourself? "Put away the sword," Jesus said. "Those who live by the sword will die by the sword." His message is so clear, the message against violence. Each of us is called to conversion. Once more, in today's readings, that's the call — to be converted to the way of Jesus, which is the way of peace, forgiveness and love.

Think of what would happen if we lived in a community — our parish family, our neighborhood, our city, our country, our world — where what Paul exhorts those Christians at Philippi to follow if we live this way, "Finally brothers and sisters, fill your minds with what is truthful, what is holy, just, lovely, and noble. Be mindful of whatever deserves praise and admiration. Put into practice the love you have learned from me, what I passed on to you." The love that Jesus teaches all of us — put that into practice and peace, a peace that's beyond understanding will fill our minds and our hearts, our neighborhoods, our country, our world. But it requires a deep conversion to the ways of God, which are not our ways, and to the truth of God shown to us in Jesus. Today we pray that we will take one further step toward that conversion.

[Homily given Oct. 8 at St. Clare of Montefalco Parish in Detroit. The transcripts of Bishop Thomas Gumbleton's homilies are [posted weekly](#) to NCRonline.org. [Sign up here](#) to receive an email alert when the latest homily is posted.]