HOMILY FOR 27TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

THEME: **TENANTS IN GOD'S VINEYARD/ BEING FAITHFUL STEWARDS OF GOD'S VINEYARD**

Readings: Isaiah 5:1-7; Philippians 4:6-9; Matthew 21:33-43

"Small negligence creates the greatest costly expense… Being a faithful steward involves attention to many details" – St. Vincent de Paul.

ON ST FRANCIS OF ASSISI

From the Church of San Damiano, Jesus told Francis, 'Go and rebuild my Church that almost lie in ruins". He did rebuild the spiritual body of Christ. 800 years later, the Church gives thanks to God for one of the most famous Saints of Middle Ages. He died at 44 years and won for himself long list of spiritual laurels. Yesterday we blessed the animals in honor of St Francis who reminds us the need to be good custodians of everything around us: the flowers, our pets, and more importantly the poor in our midst.

St. Francis of Assisi (1182–1226) was an Italian friar who abandoned a wealthy, carefree life to embrace radical poverty, charity, and a deep love for all creation.

Francis was born Giovanni di Bernardone in Assisi, Italy, to a wealthy cloth merchant. He spent his youth enjoying a lavish social life and dreaming of becoming a knight. He fought in a war against Perugia, was captured, and spent a year imprisoned, which triggered a deep period of reflection. He underwent a spiritual conversion after overcoming his fears to embrace and kiss a man with leprosy. He heard the voice of Christ at the San Damiano church telling him to "repair my house," leading him to publicly renounce his family's wealth and fine clothes.

Francis later gathered a band of followers who lived by the literal teachings of the Gospel and absolute poverty (Matt 10:9-10). He received approval from Pope Innocent III in 1209/1210 to establish the Franciscan Order (Order of Friars Minor).He co-founded the women's order of the Poor Clares with St. Clare of Assisi and inspired a third order for laypeople.

Two years before his death, Francis received the stigmata (the wounds of Christ) on his hands, feet, and side during a vision on Mount Verna in 1224. He composed the "Canticle of Brother Sun," celebrating nature and creation as part of his spiritual family. He died on October 4, 1226, at age 44, and was canonized just two years later by Pope Gregory IX.

The Church honors St Francis as the patron saint of animals and ecology, with his feast day celebrated on October 4th. Today is his 8th centenary of heavenly birth.

The spiritual legacy of **St. Francis of Assisi** centers on radical evangelical poverty, profound humility, and an intimate kinship with all creation.

By stripping himself of his wealthy merchant inheritance, St Francis demonstrated that letting go of material wealth leads to complete dependence on God and deep spiritual joy.

Viewing the natural world as a divine mirror of God's beauty, he famously addressed animals and elements as brothers and sisters, earning recognition as the patron saint of ecology. Hence the blessing of animals around his feast. The popular canticle of the sun is in praise of God through nature's beauty.

His lifelong conformity to the Gospel culminated in receiving the stigmata (the wounds of Christ) in 1224, symbolizing total union with the Beloved.

Greeting others with *"Peace and all good,"* St Francis modeled active peacemaking, notably crossing enemy lines to speak peaceably with the Sultan during the Crusades.

He embodied a life where prayer was not merely an action, but a continuous state of being, often retreating to hermitages for deep communion with God.

GOSPEL REFLECTIONS:

As tenants in God's vineyard, the readings today invite us to look honestly at the fruit our lives are producing. God has entrusted each of us with a vineyard (Jn 15:5- Jesus told his disciples, I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because cut off from me you can do nothing). The vineyards that God has entrusted us with are-the gift of life, faith, family, relationships and opportunities. He lovingly cares for us, but He also expects our lives to produce fruits of justice, righteousness, love and goodness.

Sometimes, we can be deeply religious on the outside while our attitudes and actions towards others tell a different story. We may pray, attend masses, and participate actively in Church, yet fail to show kindness, patience, forgiveness, and respect. True faith is not measured only by what we say or collection of beliefs; but by the fruits our lives produce (Matt 7:15-20; By their fruits you will know them. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit and a rotten tree cannot bear good fruit).

St Paul in this regard reminds us to fill our hearts with whatever is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, and gracious. What fills our hearts eventually becomes visible in our words, actions, and relationships (Phil 4:8, Gal. 5:16-22). God is still looking out for good fruit from us his vineyard. May we turn away from whatever does not please Him and allow His word to transform our hearts.

God expects the vineyard of our lives to yield good fruits of justice, love, and stewardship, rather than the sour grapes of selfishness and rejection. Thus, the readings invite us to reflect deeply on God's abundant trust in humanity and on our responsibility to use His gifts effectively to make a positive impact on people's lives. The parable of the tenants and the vineyard asks us to reflect therefore on the Lord's vineyard, with its three dimensions which are: its source or identity, its call or responsibility, and its ultimate purpose.

The Gospel (Matt 21:33-43), presents the parable of the tenants in a vineyard. The owner of the vineyard is God; the tenants are the chief priests, the Sadducees, and the Pharisees. The servants are the prophets; and the son is Jesus Christ. The new tenants of the Lord's vineyard are the apostles and all of us who are called to bear good fruits for we shall all be held accountable.

In this context, we recall the prayers of St Francis of Assisi, God who are you? God who am I? This prayer calls us to reach out to the entire creation after the example of St Francis. It invites us to be tenants who care for all creation. We are tenants to everything that God has created. As good stewards, God expects us to bear good fruits not like the wicked servants in today's Gospel (Matt. 21:33-43). The challenge before us therefore is to produce fruits of love, compassion, understanding and patience with every created reality like St Francis.

The parable also reveals God's boundless love for us and profound trust in humanity: after creation, God entrusted humanity with everything. God's patience is also evident in his continual forgiveness of sinners. His respect for human freedom, coupled with an expectation of responsibility, is likewise apparent. Although God does not dictate how humanity must use these gifts, humanity will be called to account for its stewardship on the final day.

Just as the tenants in the vineyard seek to claim the vineyard without its owner, some people desire the benefits of God's kingdom without submitting to God's commands and will. Through this parable, Jesus warns that failure to bear fruit will result in being turned away in the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, we should avoid a sense of entitlement and act responsibly with what God has entrusted to us, so that we may bear abundant fruit.

In Is. 5:1-7, the prophet sings a song of a beloved vineyard that received every care from the landowner, yet produced wild, sour grapes instead of justice and integrity.

St. Paul (Phil. 4:6-9) encourages believers to replace anxiety with prayer, focusing their hearts and minds on whatever is true, honorable, pure, and lovely.

In Matthew 21:33-43, Jesus tells the parable of the wicked tenants, warning the chief priests and elders that the kingdom will be taken from those who fail to bear good fruit by rejecting the landowner's son and given to those who bear its proper fruit. Hence, we are invited to bear fruit in the Lord's vineyard which is our life in union with him. Our journey of salvation.

In the Gospel, Jesus takes the image of the vineyard and turns it sharply toward us. The landowner has leased the vineyard to us. Our lives, our families, our parishes, and our communities are gifts entrusted to our care—not property for our absolute ownership. Like St Joseph, we are custodians of God's household. The temptation of the wicked tenants is to act as owners rather than stewards, believing they can secure control by casting aside the servants and even the Son.

Jesus reminds us that we are accountable. The cornerstone that the builders rejected—Christ Himself—becomes the foundation of our entire lives. When we feel anxious about the state of the

world or our own shortcomings, St. Paul points us away from despair and toward a life anchored in prayer and virtue.

We are invited to look at the time, talents, and relationships God has given you. Do you treat them as opportunities to serve or possessions to guard? What am I doing to build up St Martin's? Have I put to use my full gifts and resources to build up this family of God? Am I an active or nominal parishioner? We are invited to practice bringing our worries directly to God in gratitude and trust, allowing His peace to guard your heart.

We are called to commit to small, daily acts of holiness, kindness, and justice so that our life yields a harvest worthy of the Master.

A lot care and hard work went into the production of quality vines and vintage wine. Because vineyards and vines were so central to the everyday life of the Israelites, they are often used symbolically in Scripture to represent God's relationship to Israel and its people. A fruitful vine was a symbol of Israel's fidelity to God, while sour grapes were an indication of Israel's infidelity (Jer. 2:21).

Our first reading today, taken from the prophet Isaiah (Is. 5:1-7), illustrates God's attentive and loving care for the people of Israel, using the image of a vine-grower's who did everything possible to produce grapes of the highest quality. 'He dug the soil, cleared it of stones and planted choice vines in it. In the middle he built a tower and cut a wine-press as well. He expected it to yield a crop of good grapes, but sour grapes were all that it gave' (Is 5:2).

What God expected from the people of Israel, after all the love and care he had shown them, was justice and integrity. Instead, what he found was bloodshed and a cry of distress (cf. Is 5:7). Isaiah goes on to paint a sad picture of Israel as an abandoned vineyard, 'a wasteland, neither pruned nor cultivated, overgrown with briers and thorns' (Is 5:6).

In our gospel reading, Jesus expands and develops the parable of the vineyard in the light of his own experience of rejection. He is speaking 'to the chief priests and elders of the people' (Mt 21: 33), who refused to accept him as the Messiah. He tells them a story about a landowner who planted a vineyard, developed it, and leased it out to tenants. Then, when harvest time drew near, he sent his servants to collect the grapes. However, the tenants seized, thrashed, stoned and even killed these servants. And this happened not just once but several times. Jesus is here referring to the rejection of the prophets whom God sent to remind the Israelites of their calling to be a holy and faithful people, a model of truthfulness and upright behaviour for other nations. Finally, as Jesus develops the parable, the landowner sends his Son, thinking that they will respect him at least. Instead, they killed him too in order to take possession of the vineyard themselves. This represents precisely what happened to Jesus himself, the beloved Son sent by the Father to the people of Israel, but rejected by the chief priests and elders of the people. Jesus was 'the stone rejected by the builders that became the keystone' (Mt 21:42).

These readings are not merely an account of Israel's ingratitude and infidelity, or of Jesus' rejection by the chief priests and elders of the people. They are addressed to us here today. They challenge us to ask ourselves what God expects of us, after all the love and care he has shown us? We are privileged, by baptism, to be called to work in the Lord's vineyard. Every Sunday we are invited to gather together to hear the Gospel message and to make it part of our lives. We are God's new people, called to be faithful and active members of the Body of Christ, the Church. We are those 'other tenants' whom the Lord expects 'to deliver the produce to him when the season arrives' (Mt 21:41). What kind of grapes do we produce? Are they sweet and luscious, or dry and sour? Have we lived up to the Lord's expectations of us as a community of his beloved disciples? What kind of impact do we have on the world around us? Can we honestly say that we are people of justice and integrity? Am I a person of justice and integrity?

In today's Second Reading, St Paul offers us practical guidance on how to produce good fruit in our lives and live up to the Lord's expectations of us. 'Finally, brothers and sisters, fill your minds with everything that is true, everything that is noble. Everything that is good and pure, everything that we love and honour, and everything that can be thought virtuous or worthy of praise' (Phil 4:8).

God has invested in us so much. He expects us to bear fruit. But to bear good fruit we need to remain united with Christ.

Let us ask God to give us the grace to be fruitful. May we try to avoid being like the wicked servants whose intention is really wicked to the point of killing the heir of the vineyard.

We all have talents, gifts, resources and a whole lot of other things for the spiritual and material benefits of our family, society and this parish at large.

Jesus is reminding us that He is the holy vine (Jn 15:1-17). To bear fruit, we need to remain united with Jesus.

What we are is simply tenants. We are called to take care of the vineyard of the Lord; we don't own it. So let us pray that God will help us realize that we are tenants and so be like responsible tenants who produce spiritual fruits of heavenly virtues like St Francis of Assisi. Let us earnestly pray, 'A clean heart create for me, oh God; renew within me a steadfast spirit' (Ps. 51:12)

Peace be with you.