



a Kendall Hunt Company

## Twenty-seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A, Catechist - RCLB Lectionary



### Catechist Background and Preparation

To prepare for this session, read all the readings.

Isaiah 5:1-7

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

Philippians 4:6-9

Matthew 21:33-43

Spend a few minutes reflecting on what these readings mean for you today. Is there a particular reading that appeals to you? Is there a word or image that engages you?

RCL Benziger

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Read the following **Word in Liturgy** and **Catholic Doctrine** sections. Read the Word in Liturgy and Catholic Doctrine sections. These give you background on what you will be doing this session. Read over the session outline and make it your own. Check to see what materials you will need.

### The Word In Liturgy

The exact circumstances in which Isaiah delivered the stinging indictment represented by today's "Song of the Vineyard" are not clear. However, we know enough of the ministry of the eighth-century prophet to surmise that he is addressing the social and political injustices and infidelities that so often represented a national betrayal of the covenant with Yahweh, and that so often provoked his condemnation. The unit is a skillfully developed parable, reminiscent of popular Hebrew love poetry, but with a savage ending that forces the hearer to conclude that the nation is deserving of divine wrath. The concluding indictment (the

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language mimics a judicial process) in verse 7 holds a clue to the source of the prophet's ire, but there is a play on words most often lost in translation: "He looked for judgment (mispat), but see, bloodshed (mispah)! For justice (sedaqa), but hark, the outcry (se'aqa)!" In Isaiah the "justice" that the Lord seeks most often refers to social relationships grounded in fairness and equity. The absence of such conditions meant that the rich and powerful were oppressing and exploiting the weak and disadvantaged—politically, economically, or both. The prophet's ministry involved pointing out to his fellow countrymen the religious significance of such behaviors. Exploitative relationships with others destroyed their own "righteousness," i.e., their right relationship with Yahweh, whose covenant and whose consistent way of dealing with his chosen vineyard, Israel, demanded in return justice and compassion, not their opposites. Yahweh's "righteousness" and "justice" require reciprocity, not only in the people's relationship with him but with one another as well. Failing that, the people are deserving of divine judgment ("Now I will let you know what I mean to do to my

vineyard . . ." v. 5).

Matthew inserts today's story of the vineyard as second in a series of three parables, within a larger section (21:23-22:14), that details Jesus' controversy with the chief priests and elders of the people. As it appears in Matthew's version, the story has become more of an allegory than a true parable, a strong indicator that Jesus' original words have been adapted to fit the situation of a later generation. In fact, the destruction of Jerusalem in the year 70 can be presumed and was considered by many Christians at the time as God's judgment on Israel's failure to accept Jesus as the Messiah. (Matthew's quotation of Psalm 118:22-23 seems to reinforce this view.) Matthew's point, however, is not this. Rather, it is a stern warning to his own community, the present tenants of the vineyard, not to fail in their responsibility to "yield a rich harvest" (v. 43; cf. also John 4:35-38). The reminder that divine justice and judgment will ultimately prevail is a message for every generation of believers.

## **Catholic Doctrine**

### ***Divine Justice and Judgment***

The theological concept of divine justice and judgment is first grounded in the biblical theme that God is the ultimate source and destiny of the universe, our Creator who rules over all things. God is not random or capricious, but is good, and created the world in goodness, beauty, and order (CCC 341). Part of that arrangement, originating in God's wisdom, is moral order, by which actions are understood to be right or wrong (CCC 1954). Revelation shows us

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explicitly that God is just, always rejecting what is evil and embracing what is good. God is not indifferent to human behavior but, rather, is intimately aware of what we do and how it either contributes to or obstructs the good that he desires for us.

Having created the world, God continues to govern it in ways that are beyond human understanding, yet which are just and will ultimately be revealed as such (CCC 309–12). For example, God tolerates the existence of human sinfulness, which may seem unjust, yet by doing so, he gives everyone a full measure of time in which to repent. Unlike human justice, which is imperfect and variable, God’s justice is eternal and surpasses all human judgments in its love and goodness (CCC 313). Although those who do evil have reason to fear the ultimate punishment that awaits them, in Jesus it is revealed that God’s justice is the embodiment of mercy.

God continually offers salvation to all (CCC 74) and did not abandon us after our fall from original grace (CCC 410). Thus, the Catholic Church asserts that no one is predestined to damnation (CCC 1037). Our vocation as human beings is rather, in Jesus, our divinization and our complete union with God (CCC 27, 460). But while the reign of sin is ended because of the death and resurrection of Jesus and we are reconciled to God in Christ, nevertheless, sin still persists in the world. Why? Karl Rahner notes that we are most like God in our freedom, that ability to choose growth, goodness, and maturity in Christ. “We do this by saying ‘Yes’ to the world, to life, to our neighbor and, in and through all of this, to God.” (ModCathE 805). But for us finite creatures, freedom means that we can possibly choose the opposite and say ‘No’ to goodness and engage in moral evil, committing sin.

An important theme in the preaching of Jesus is that this world will someday come to an end—it is transitory—and that our conduct in this passing world will be judged. Indeed, our attitude about our neighbor will disclose our acceptance or refusal of God’s grace (CCC 678). As Matthew’s parable of the final judgment (Matthew 25) illustrates, “the least” of our neighbors are precisely those with whom God has chosen to identify, and so our treatment of them will show the truth or falsity of our love for God. Christ has come in order to offer us the fullness of life in God, yet our lack of charity toward others may, in effect, by our own actions, condemn us.



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Catholic teaching emphasizes that at each individual's death there is a judgment that takes place. At that judgment one is either rewarded with heaven or condemned to hell, heaven being complete and total union in joy with God and hell being total separation from God (CCC 1023 and 1033). In addition, the Church describes purgatory as that stage of final purification needed by those who are not perfectly holy at death but who nonetheless are assured of heaven after this cleansing (CCC 1030).

