

2020 27TH SUNDAY

A friend of mine sent me a letter a month or so ago in which she gave full vent to the anger and frustration she is currently feeling- all caused by the anti-social behaviour of her teenage son.

She longs for the long-distant days when he would grace her with a smile or a gracious word. Now he just grunts and scowls at her.

She remembers with nostalgia the days when he was communicative, friendly and helpful. Now he does nothing around the house. And his gear clutters every room for her to pick up.

She would love him to join the rest of the family for meals. But mostly he helps himself to whatever is in the fridge and makes jolly sure he is nowhere near the house at mealtime.

He is joyless, lethargic and prickly.

The mother thinks of the huge sacrifices she has made for her boy. And she made them willingly. But now she feels deeply angry. She knows that she has a right to her son's love and respect. And until he wakes up to this and responds appropriately their relationship will become ever-more poisoned.

In his Writings, the Prophet Isaiah uses the most intimate words possible to describe God's love for Israel. In our 1st Reading Israel is described as God's vineyard. And God pleads with His vineyard: "I dug the soil. I cleared the stones and planted the choicest of vines. I could not have done more for you, my vineyard." But then, like the mother in the that sad letter we hear the despairing lament: 'What more could I have done for you, my vineyard, that I have not done? I expected you to yield grapes. But you yielded sour grapes instead. I expected to find justice and integrity in my vineyard. What I find instead is bloodshed and the poor crying out in distress.'

Jesus' parable is likewise a lament on the unwillingness of Israel to respond positively to His teachings.

The vineyard could just as easily be Aotearoa-New Zealand.

Our land is a country of wide-open spaces and exquisite scenery...rich in food and resources. It is a country of awe-inspiring beauty.

New Zealand is God's Creation. We the citizens of New Zealand are merely the tenants of our beautiful country. But are we good tenants?

To be good tenants we must have laws which protect the least educated, the most debilitated, the most impoverished and the most vulnerable of our citizens. We must have laws must also protect our air, our rivers and our land from despoliation.

The framing of good laws is the responsibility of Parliament.

It is therefore imperative that we ponder carefully over how we will vote over the next fortnight.

Which Party's manifesto best harmonizes with Jesus' social teachings?

Which Party best protects the most vulnerable in our community? We remember that the unborn in the womb and the terminally ill are among our most vulnerable.

Which Party will best ensure that all New Zealanders have adequate food on the table?

Which Party will walk the extra mile to see that all New Zealanders are warmly housed?

Which Party will make laws which help the poor to access proper health and dental care?

Which Party will ensure that all children have equitable educational opportunities?

Which Party will work best to assist immigrants and the unskilled to find employment.

Has the Party you intend voting for any practical interest in protecting our environment from despoliation?

The angry mother in her letter was, I sense, weeping for her teenage son because she knew that his selfishness was self-destructive. Unless he changed from such narcissism, his life would be pitted with loveless relationships- a sure path to hopelessness and despair.

Jesus wept over Jerusalem because He knew that their rejection of His Gospel of Mercy would result in Israel no longer being the beating heart of God's Kingdom on Earth. Rather Israel would come to languish on the periphery of the Kingdom. Jesus was a loyal Jew and rejoiced in Israel's special favour with God. He wept over the self-destructive path they were on.

Does God delight in we the people of New Zealand? Or does God weep over us as Jesus wept over His own country?

I cannot answer that.

All I do know is that God loves us unconditionally and is asking us at this time to vote in harmony with His Will, as His faithful sons and daughters- to do what we can -to ensure that those people who enter our Parliament will be people with righteous hearts.

God bless you as you ponder. Let us all pray that the people of our nation will respond to the voice of God speaking to them in their hearts.