

PRODUCE FRUITS OF THE KINGDOM – LIVE YOUR STRENGTHS!

“When I expected it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes?” On this Thanksgiving weekend, when we take some time to raise our hearts and minds in gratitude for the bounty that he has bestowed upon us through the fruits of the earth, we are also called to reflect on the fruitfulness of our personal lives.

Am I producing grapes, fruits of the kingdom, or something else of a bitter, unpleasant variety that gives no delight to myself or to the Lord? What has the Lord given me personally? What particular variety of grape am I called to cultivate and harvest and give back to the Lord?

Flourishing, growing, being fruitful is fundamental to our primary vocation as human beings made in the image and likeness of God. In Genesis we recall the original imperative: be fruitful and multiply. There is in each of us an innate drive to be fruitful, to make something of our lives.

Often we mistake being fruitful though with being successful. At the end of our lives, when we bring to the Lord the produce of our lives, God will not look to see how much is in our bank account, how well known we are, what position we had in our work place. He will look for the fruits of our lives. Have we grown in our unique capacity, have we worked with Jesus to produce fruits of the kingdom (fruits that speak of whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable as St. Paul says in the second reading).

The tragedy, as we read in the first reading and the Gospel is that so often in the world there is found bitter fruit, a yield which does not build up God’s Kingdom. Our insecurities, our fears lead us to possess, to grasp, to see what the other person has and be envious of it, resulting in havoc, violence, destruction, as we learned in today’s Gospel parable. God calls us to another path, a path that will bring us the “peace of God which surpasses all understanding [which] guards our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.” (Phil 4.7)

How to find that peace, how to live from that uniquely joyful place, confident that how I am personally living brings God delight, a life that produces a grape that matures into a beautiful wine that warms the heart of our Lord? I think part of the answer lies in self-awareness of our personal qualities, the particular gifts and talents that God has gifted me with, and from that awareness develop those gifts in service of my neighbour for the glory of God, working with Jesus as his co-labourer, as his disciple in building his kingdom (not my kingdom).

In reflecting on where I am now in my life and finding myself flourishing in my priesthood, I can say that this has not always been the case. At different points in my life I was producing bitter grapes, I was not happy, not peaceful. For instance, in grade 13, when I first began to make decisions about my life, I was more concerned about going into a career that would bring me success, work that would pay well, give me a certain status, a certain material security. From that basis I enrolled in all kinds of math and science courses. After 6 weeks and after severely failing my first Calculus test, I realized that math and science were not for me, it left me frustrated and unhappy. I grinded my way through the final year of high school, got off to university and enrolled in general arts. I found I really flourished in Religious

Studies and History. I was fascinated with God and people and the historical influences that shape us. I got involved in the Catholic community on campus and found that rewarding too.

I finished my degree and was faced with that question again: what do I do for work? I had to live, support myself and so after sending out a number of resumes, ended up in a retail management program. The sales goals, the merchandizing systems, the waste reduction programs that were to increase profitability, all produced bitter grapes in me. What I did find myself flourishing in though, was the relationships that I formed with all the young part-time workers who were in high school and university. I appreciated them opening up and sharing with me their heart-aches, their dreams, their life plans and I in my turn found myself encouraging them, being a sounding board for them. I realized that my gifts lay in the area of relationships, developing the human person. That discovery led me to teaching and eventually discerning a priestly vocation. Today, if someone was to ask me to produce a financial statement on my own for the parish I would be lost, anxious and unhappy but if a couple came to me and said they wanted to be married in the Church, I would find myself alive, vibrant, keenly interested in their well-being and their hopes. That is me, that is where my gifts lie, that is where I am called to produce fruits of the kingdom.

My brothers and sisters in Christ, where do your gifts lie, how has God uniquely created you and gifted you? What wine will your grapes produce? A Shiraz, a Beaujolais, a Merlot? If you are a Cabernet Sauvignon, do not try to be Pinot Noir. God has uniquely endowed you with talents that he wants you to use in being a co-labourer with his son Jesus Christ. St. Catherine of Sienna says that if we are who we should be we will set the world on fire! Imagine that – St. Patrick’s Parish on fire!

We have in our parish an initiative whereby each individual has the opportunity to discover what their unique gifts are. (You may have seen the banner in the lobby) I believe, and there is good scientific evidence to back this up, that God wants us to be happy, to experience that abundant life that Jesus has come to bring each of us (John 10.10), to flourish, to be fruitful in a way that glorifies him and builds up his Kingdom. Please take home a bulletin containing an insert on this initiative. There are people in the lobby who can answer your questions after mass. There will be a workshop on November 11th...

It is my hope that our parish, more fully aware of how each of us are uniquely gifted, will build up a culture of dialogue, by humbly recognizing that what might be my weakness (logical, empirical thinking) is somebody else’s strength and together we will produce fruits of the Kingdom. On that last day when we come before the Lord, we will not be worried about how successful or unsuccessful we were, instead we will be overjoyed in bringing fruits that gladden the heart of God. Knowing that, even now, fills me with a peace which is beyond all understanding and it guards my heart and my mind in Christ Jesus.