

Dear members and friends of our parish family,

This has been a difficult week in the aftermath of the Las Vegas shootings. I have spoken with many who have struggled to find hope in the face of such senseless violence. Indeed, we live in a world in which violence has become the cornerstone of the 24/7 news cycle that has become the background noise to our life. In such a climate, we often find ourselves reacting at one moment in utter bewilderment, in the next with anger of our own against the evil which seems to run rampant, and in the next with a kind of numb resignation to that which we seem powerless to stop. As a people of faith, we may seek more than most to find meaning in such events; certainly prayer is a refuge in these times but, even so, feelings of pain and loss and anger persist. Our life together as disciples teaches us that we must be equally persistent in our prayer, that when we are drawn away from our center that is in God and are tempted to act, or react, from some lesser place of passion or suffering, God invites us to return to a place of wholeness—a place of healing. It is only from the place of wholeness that we may begin to respond to the evil of the world with the love and compassion of Christ.

On this upcoming 18th Sunday after Pentecost, we continue with Matthew's depiction of Jesus' being confronted with the temple leaders following his triumphant entry into Jerusalem (Matthew 21:33-46). Jesus shares the parable of the wicked tenants, the second of three parables told in response to the religious authorities. Presented as an allegory, the parable represents God as the landowner, the land of Israel as the vineyard, and the Jewish religious leaders as the tenants; the Old Testament prophets are the slaves sent to collect the produce from the tenants and Jesus is the son killed by the tenants. The new tenants of the vineyard are generally assumed to be the Church, and for centuries this parable has been used as justification for the displacement of the Jewish people. It is important to realize, however, that Jesus is speaking very specifically to the temple leaders and not crowds of Jews who were following him. It is also important to remember that these events follow Jesus' healing of the blind and the lame and that it is the outcast and the poor that Jesus has proclaimed as favored in God's sight. I ask that in reflecting on this parable you consider why Jesus has identified this group as favored. How have the temple leaders failed to produce fruit?

Our reading from Isaiah echoes Jesus' reference to the rejected stone that has become the cornerstone, and we may be equally challenged in understanding how we may find ourselves broken open, or crushed, by this "stone." What other "cornerstones" of our culture will divert us and cause us to reject "the stone?" These are difficult readings, but I pray you find in them rich material for reflection and study.

In celebration of our Parish Partnership, please welcome Mother Kathleen this Sunday as she presides and preaches on these important texts.

Also, please join me and others for the 8am Wednesday Eucharist as we celebrate the Feast of Philip the Evangelist. I have been overjoyed by the faithful participation of so many souls in this simple weekday Eucharist and, if you haven't attended in a while, or if you've never attended, I hope you can join us for this longstanding tradition. A light breakfast follows.

Faithfully,

John+