

Winemaking ... or viticulture ... first flourished in the Mediterranean basin due to the influence of various early civilizations such as the Phoenicians, Greeks, and Romans. The Mediterranean climate is characterized by long growing seasons of moderate or warm temperatures. During the growing season, there is very little rainfall. Instead, most of the rainfall occurs in the winter months, which are characteristically on the warm side.

This unique climate exists mostly in coastal regions on either side of the 40th parallel in both the northern and southern hemispheres. Outside of the Mediterranean area, regions suitable for growing wine-grapes exist along the California coast, including Napa Valley, Chile, both northern and southern Africa, as well as western and southern Australia.

The oldest known winery was discovered in southeastern Armenia, and is over 6,000 years old. Yet because of the sophistication of the wine-making process in that particular find, it has been suggested that the wine-making is much older than even that.

In today's First Reading we hear from Isaiah chapter 5 ... what is called the "Song of the Vineyard." It is a sort of parable meant to admonish Israel for their sins. God is telling them that no matter what He has done for them, they continue to ignore His law and His presence.

In the Gospel, Jesus tells the "Parable of the Vineyard," in which the tenant workers rebel against a landowner by attacking and killing his servants. As a last effort, the owner sends his son - whom they also murder. Here, the message is that God gave Israel the Promised Land ... and sent prophets who were ignored or, worse, killed ... and in this parable, Jesus speaks of His coming ... and predicts his own death at the hands of the religious leaders who despite their external trappings are rebelling against God, while pretending to be God's chosen people.

In the passages from Isaiah that follow what we just heard in today's reading, through the prophet ... God enumerates six sins against Israel ... namely: (1) greed, (2) lack of self-control, (3) false-piety, (4) deceit, (5) self-aggrandizement, and (6) injustice.

Contrast these six vices with the six things that St. Paul describes as “*excellence*” and praiseworthy in the Second Reading:

*whatever is true, whatever is honorable,
whatever is just, whatever is pure,
whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious ...*

Here you have an almost one-to-one correlation between the sins that God complains of in Isaiah ... with the virtues that St. Paul says have been “*learned and received*” by the early Christian ... and “*heard and seen in*” his own example. By embracing the example and teaching of the apostles ... and by reaching out to God in “*prayer and petition*” as well as acknowledging God’s generosity through “*thanksgiving*”, the Philippians are told that “*the God of peace will be with*” them ... and that:

*the peace of God that surpasses all understanding
will guard [their] hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*

If that sounds familiar, it is because it is almost word-for-word from the blessing I pray at the end of Mass every weekend.

Just as there is are narrow conditions necessary for successfully growing grapes ... so, too, there is a narrow path that we must follow as disciples of Jesus Christ. We cannot make things up as we go along ... rather, we must follow Jesus Who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life ... for all who choose to follow Him ... and for all who desire to receive Salvation through, with, and in Christ Jesus our Lord.

As we approach this altar to receive the sacred Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ ... let us examine our own life according to those six criteria from St. Paul and ask ourselves if we persevere in truth, honor, justice, purity, beauty, and grace ... and if there are areas that need ‘fixing,’ then invite Jesus into those areas of our lives that need him most ... so that He may redeem us in His love, His grace, and His mercy.

May the peace of God which surpasses all understanding keep your hearts and your minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.