

There are some weeks when the Gospel selection is difficult for us. It can cause us to look more closely at ourselves and there are times when we don't like what we see. This Sunday is one of those Gospel's that can ruffle our feathers, can disturb our quiet indifference. The thrust of the Gospel today is that we have to respond **worthily** to God's generosity, God's grace, the privilege of **freedom** we have been granted by God.

The parable tells of the landowner's repeated gesture to the tenants, affording them the opportunity to do the right thing. They refused! They truly abused the freedom granted them. Although this parable is intended to warn the leadership of the temple and community of Jesus' time we would be negligent if we don't take this opportunity to examine ourselves, and our response to God's gift of freedom.

Is it's our will or God's will that we follow?

That's the choice we consider as we listen to the Gospel. The tenants placed their will above the will of the landowner. They said that they were going to do what they wanted to do with the yield of the vineyard, without regard to their responsibility to the landowner with whom they had made an agreement. To further compound their transgression, they killed first the servants of the landowner, and even, eventually, his son. We are supposed to see the parallel to

the Jewish leaders rejecting Christ and putting Him to death, but we cannot, we must not, separate this story from our own lives, and our own experiences.

Do we allow God's will to direct our lives? Are we open to the Holy Spirit that seeks to guide us? Are we determined to do it our own way? In general we say that we accept God's will, but do we really? How do we accommodate God in our daily lives? What do we **sacrifice** on His behalf? Although Jesus' example was one of forgiveness and mercy, it was also one of **sacrifice**. What do we deny ourselves, for God?

know that for myself there are far too many times I don't even yield an extra five minutes of my time for God. How can I say that I am living a Christ-centered life? Although there are times when I rise to the occasion, there are many more when I fall short.

I was unaware until last evening that the retired archbishop of New Orleans, Philip Hannan, died on Thursday. I was reading the obituary of Archbishop Hannan last evening, and there is much about his obituary that suggests the second reading to me. In many ways the archbishop exemplified the words of Paul in his letter to the Philippians, in the way he lived his vocation, the way he lived his life as a servant to God.

When I read about Archbishop Hannan I was struck by the consistency with which he worked to educate the youth, to care for the poor, to oppose abortion, and to spread the Gospel. He did this in as diverse a priesthood as anyone has ever lived: wartime chaplain and paratrooper, peacetime advisor, in secret, to a

young congressman from Massachusetts who would later be elected President of the U.S., participant (as a bishop) in all four sessions of Vatican II, author, civil rights advocate, chancellor of a an archdiocese, editor of the archdiocesan newspaper, founder of a Catholic television network, canon lawyer, monsignor, auxiliary bishop, archbishop. He was a priest for 71 years and a bishop for 55 of those years, an astounding term of service.

His life can be considered a hymn to the virtues of life that Paul extolled in his letter to the Philippians. His life was an active prayer in service to God. We can safely say that his appreciation for his priesthood and for the Gospel was evident in his life. He was guided by principles rather than popularity. He accepted God's grace and lived it worthily.

I like that word, "worthily". It's our challenge - can we live in such a way that we are considered, by God, to be worthy of His blessings? It is truly a challenge. Although we have as many second chances as we want, at some point we have to stop asking for another chance and live as though we mean it when we say we are Christian.

It's not a coincidence that we have these readings today, the Sunday that we set aside to "Respect Life". Basically, when we respect life, in all of its manifestations, we respect God. By "life in all of its manifestations" I mean the unborn, the newly born, the poor, the addicted, the mentally disabled, the wounded, the enemy, those who are starving in Sudan, the homeless in Haiti, the homeless in the United States, the immigrants crossing the desert, the prisoners on death row, those dying from AIDS, the elderly, many of whom have lost their

mental acuity. We can no more ignore the poor than we can ignore abortion; we can no more ignore those we have condemned to die by our indifference than those on death row. We can no more ignore the environment than we can ignore our own lives. We have been told and reminded that God is love. Love is life itself, expressed in OUR existence, your life and my life, which are granted by the grace of God. If we say that we love God then we must love life!

At the end of the day, at the end of our lives, will we be able to say that we respected God? Because to do so, is to respect life. God is love and is the source of life; God is the source of all life, and of all blessing, of all grace, of all freedom, of all privilege.

The freedom we have comes from God. Other words for freedom are grace and privilege. If we love God, we spend our freedom in response to God. If we love God we love LOVE, and we love life in all its forms. If we love God we freely choose to respect life in all of its forms.

We, as tenants in the vineyard of God, have the privilege to know, love and serve God. He extends His grace, in unlimited supply to help us do that during our span of days. What will we say when He comes to collect His produce? What will God find in us? Most importantly, will we be found worthy?