

## Good and Bad Stewards of Live

**Intro.** Normally most of our interest in vineyards begins and ends with a nice glass of wine. Some of us who have been to the wine country of California, France or Spain or Florida and can attest to the beauty of the acres of vines dotting the land like endless backyard clothes lines. The images of the wildfires burning some of the vineyards in California shows row after row of vines burned, many with the grapes still hanging, useless. The pictures may bring us a bit closer to the images used in today's readings about the kingdom of heaven as a vineyard; one in ruins, the other abundantly fruitful.

**I.** In Isaiah's song of his friend's vineyard, the description is reminiscent of Genesis and the creation of the world. The friend found ground that was good; cleared it of stones; planted good vines;

and watched over it with love. (Respect Life Sunday, USCCB10/04/20). Then it failed due to sour grapes, *sin*. The gospel again uses the vineyard as the kingdom of heaven, this one doing well but watched over by people unworthy of it. In both stories, a lack of respect for God's gift marred his hope for his people. October is Respect Life month and today Respect Life Sunday, a time to reflect on the sacred gift of human life and how we can cherish and protect the lives of all our sisters and brothers (Ibid). It is also a month to pray the rosary and read the scriptures more. This year we mark "the twenty-fifth anniversary of Pope St. John Paul II's encyclical, *The Gospel of Life*, affirming the teaching of the value of life (Ibid). Some of the people who most need our care are treated as if their lives don't matter (Ibid). The unborn children whose lives are taken in

abortion; our elders who some say should have assisted deaths; people in prison and condemned to death; and others already mentioned in the talk by our Respect Life Committee before Mass.

**Concl.** In one of the clearest explanations for how to get to the kingdom of heaven, in Matthew 25:40, the Lord told us, “...as you did it for one of the least of these my brothers (and sisters), you did it for me.” This too echoes Genesis when Cain asked God, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” (4:9), the answer is a resounding yes! We **are** indeed keeper of our brothers and sisters. Sometimes in this polarized world we focus too much on ideas and positions rather than on people. Respect Life is much broader than abortion which, make no mistake is very important; but also important are end of life decisions, assisted suicide, hunger, homelessness,

discrimination, care of the sick, the environment and economic opportunity. The late Archbishop Joseph Bernardin of Chicago, called respect for life “a seamless garment” that can’t be split or torn into pieces. It is all connected by a common thread; *we* are connected to one another by God’s gift of creation. Like the vineyard in the gospel, we are responsible to care for all of the earthly vineyard given us by God. Respect for life means being respectful of each person regardless of our different cultures, colors or opinions. **Under all that “stuff” we are God’s people whom he created in his image and are thus “very good.” By our actions we can refuse to produce sour grapes and instead, sweet grapes and fine wine.**

Fr. Michael Pendergraft

October 4, 2020