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“The stone rejected becomes the cornerstone” (Matt 21:42).

Twenty-Seventh Sunday of the Year

Saint Francis of Assisi

Isa 5:1-7; Ps 80; Phil 4:6-9; Matt 21:33-43

October 4, 2020, may be remembered for the convergence of several events and themes that mark the path the world must take into an uncertain future. An aging and visibly weary Pope Francis chose this weekend to emerge from self-imposed quarantine in the Vatican to visit the tomb of St. Francis in Assisi, where he signed his latest letter to the world on the need for solidarity.

The pope’s letter follows a video message to the United Nations September 25, in which he set out a vision for the international community when it emerges from the pandemic to rebuild the world by addressing the distortions that have produced climate change, economic disparity and other issues that are threatening the future of the planet. The pope concluded his UN message: “We never emerge from a crisis just as we were. We come out either better or worse. At this critical juncture it is our duty to rethink the future of our common home and our common project.”

Today’s liturgy is for the 27th Sunday of the Year and the annual feast of St Francis of Assisi. It focuses our attention on Jesus’ Parable of the Vineyard as both an image of God’s Creation and a lamentation on the failure of its stewards to care for it. Jesus applies Isaiah’s story to his critics for their failure to listen to the prophets sent to

challenge their tenure. They even scheme to kill the owner's son to take possession of the vineyard, which has produced only sour grapes.

Matthew takes up this apocalyptic theme toward the end of his Gospel to imply that the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE was because of the nation's refusal to heed Jesus and the grace of conversion he was offering. Pope Francis hears this same lamentation resonate in what may be his last exhortation.

During his seven years in office, the pope has repeatedly warned that the world must change if it is to be spared the kinds of crises that are now daily headlines: Political and economic instability, ceaseless wars, increasingly destructive weather patterns, a deadly pandemic, millions of displaced people, racial and religious divisions stoked by voices of fear and exclusion.

Whether the world emerges from crisis better or worse hinges on leadership. Solidarity requires leaders who can unite competing interests into common purpose. The pope's voice has been consistent and comprehensive but often drowned out by the noise of both international tensions and the church's own internal problems with sex abuse, financial scandal and clericalism. The Gospel itself often seems lost in translation by the church's failure to integrate women, evangelize youth and engage cultural change. Where do we go from here?

Everything Pope Francis has attempted reveals his faith in a future he will not live to see but continues to proclaim because Jesus was "the stone rejected that became the cornerstone" (Ps 118). Jesus' rejection on the cross was the triumph of love revealed by his resurrection. This pattern is the trajectory from death to new life and the promise that the future he won for us will arrive when and wherever it is welcomed.

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