

27th Sunday of Ordinary Time – Cycle A (October 2, 2011)

The waiter brought the dessert tray to the table and asked, "Would you like one of the desserts under the glass cover?" I have an immense sweet tooth: I wanted them all! My doctor told me to lower my cholesterol and lose weight and that I needed to eat half the steak or half the chicken. He told me the portion should be no larger than the palm of my hand or a deck of cards. Who's he kidding? I want it all! Limitations are difficult realities to come to terms with. In so many instances, we want it all with little or no limitation.

The religious leaders confronting Jesus were given yet another difficult parable aimed at them and their insatiable desire to grasp all the power and authority they could. They lost sight of their limitations, and in doing so, they became disconnected with the people they were supposed to be serving. The evil tenants in the parable wanted it all and their need to have it all escalated with each group of servants until the son came on the scene. If only they could be rid of him, the heir to the vineyard, the entire vineyard would be theirs. The servants represented all the rejected prophets, the son is of course Jesus, who was a threat to their position and power. They wanted to eliminate Jesus and retain their control. They wanted it all!

We want it all when we refuse to close certain doors and windows so that we don't have to choose: let's keep *all options* open at *all times*. Choosing one partner, one career, one religious system becomes impossible to the one who refuses limitations and life-long choices. We want the career, the marriage, the family with few limitations. We want it all! Parents run from game to game; from activity to activity; juggling work, time with kids, time with the spouse or significant other; making dinner vs. fast food; dealing with everyday problems. What happens to prayer, or relaxation, or simply quiet time?

The truth is we can't have it all, and when we try, our lives bear little or no fruit. We become disconnected with those we love, especially God. And when we become separated from God, our spirits wither like the branches disconnected from the vine. We end up being our own "god" in a world in which we determine right and wrong and what limitations we choose to embrace or reject. Life is totally on our terms.

The leaders Jesus was addressing wanted it all on their terms and they were determined to reject completely the one person who would force them to let go and become the peoples' servants, not their Lord. These religious leaders lost their ability to produce fruit and they were preventing the people, the vineyard, from being fruitful. In their isolation from the God they were supposed to be serving, their hearts turned to stone.

Whatever our state in life: single, married, parent or religious, in order for our lives and relationships to bear fruit we must make choices to that allow God to be at the heart of our lives and vocations. We have to make choices that limit what we do with our time, choices that eliminate so many options that allow our lives to be focused and grounded. God created us and entrusted us with the vineyard of the church and we are connected with each other through our baptism; we support each other on this difficult journey of life, shouldering the burdens and celebrating the joys.

Everything has been given to us by God, including our relationships, talents, possessions and the created world. We don't need to have it all or do it all, for when God is at the heart of our lives, we already have it all.