

Homily for the Twenty-Seventh Sunday of Ordinary Time (A)
St. Joseph's Neier October 4-5, 2014
Rev. Kevin Schmittgens

Central Idea: We are called to take care of the vineyards of our lives, our bodies, our children, our environment.

What will the owner of the vineyard do to those tenants when he comes?

We are all tenant farmers, we are all temps, whether we want to admit it or not. Let me explain.

I am pastor of St. Joseph's Neier Parish. In another nine months, I will become President of St. Francis Borgia Regional High School. Obviously, I am very important. Or so it seems. No matter how well or poorly I do, no matter how beloved or hated I may become, no matter how long I hold on to both this place and Borgia, I will eventually no longer be pastor, no longer be president. That is life. I hope this moment happens later rather than sooner, but make no mistake about it, it will happen. To put it another way, I am a tenant farmer. I don't *own* St. Joseph's. I don't *own* Borgia. I am a steward. I am a temp. I am only here temporarily.

It seems to me you could go in one of two directions with this idea. You might figure, since the vineyard is really not yours, you can waste it, abuse it, neglect it, trash it and generally let it go. What difference does it make? This is what scares me about some people who have no principles, no values, no morality, no beliefs whatsoever. If it is not mine, what difference does it make.

The other way, is the exact opposite of that attitude. The other way is to realize that because it is not yours, you must take EXTRA special care of it. When you borrow an item from someone, a car, a lawnmower, any item, the rule is that you bring it back in the same shape, if not better shape than when you borrowed it. At least, that is how I was brought up. I have had the good fortune of staying at some people's somewhat expensive homes, I always felt that it was imperative that I clean up my mess and leave the place spotless, after all, it didn't belong to me, I was only using it for a short while. Thus it is with the vineyard.

What are the vineyards of your life, the places you are called to tend, to take care of, to nurture and cultivate, at least temporarily. Let me suggest three.

Your own body. The simple truth of human existence is that you get a body and only one body to walk through this world with. How you take care of it, (or don't) says volumes and certainly effects not only your life, but your relationship with others and with God. That being said, how well do you take care of this precious gift? I would give

myself a B, to be totally honest. How much sleep are you getting? How much exercise? Do you nourish it well? Do you abuse it with tobacco or excess alcohol or even drugs? I am an all too avid follower of Mobile Patrol, the local website for arrests, and it saddens me that number of people who are brought in for drug possession. The sad truth is, you can see it all over their faces. I have a little game I play where I guess if the person is older or young than I am. More often than not, they look older than me, but they are often years younger chronologically. It is a stark reminder of how we need to take care of the one and only body we get. And the B, well I need to use sun screen more often, eat a bit better and get a bit more exercise.

Our children. The horror of the clergy sexual abuse scandal, for me at least, is that it was such an abuse of trust and responsibility. Children are given to our care and we have a duty and an obligation to make good on that task. And some of my brother priests, and some of our hierarchy failed miserably and sinfully in this task. But it goes much further than merely keeping children safe. Recently, I posted a quote on Facebook that got a massive response. It read: we handicap our children when we make their lives too easy. Besides keeping them secure and protected, ironically, we also need to challenge and test them. We do our children no favors by making everything effortless and trouble-free. When a student at school is struggling with a subject, I remind them that this is a *good* thing. We all need tasks that stretch us. We all need tasks that are demanding and hard. We all need things that calls us to effort and exertion. Why? Because those things are going to keep coming in our lives and the more we learn to deal with them, the better off we will be in the long term. So raising children is this tricky balance between nurturing them and challenging them. Good luck with that parents!

Our environment. I am not a “tree hugger,” whatever that means. But I am disturbed by the amount of energy we waste, literally and figuratively, arguing about environmental issues. To be honest, there is plenty of hypocrisy to go around. I love the celebrities who castigate me for my SUV, while they jet set around the world on yachts. On the other hand, I believe there is room for some common sense ideas on the environment. Who amongst us wants to see our planet trashed?? Back in the 60’s we made a concerted effort to end one thing, littering. And it worked. For the most part. I can hardly believe it when I see someone cavalierly throw something out their car window. And I think there are a lot of people who feel the same way. Does anyone seriously think it is a good idea to pollute our rivers and streams?? Once again, I see a need for balance, but our world needs to be taken care of. We only have this vineyard to steward. We need to take care of it.

I hate to be one of those priests who call down fire and brimstone to frighten their congregation into submission. That’s not who I am. But I think that it is important for us as Christians, as Catholics, to know that we will be called to give an account of our stewardship. As our gospel warns: *What will the owner of the vineyard do to those tenants when he comes?*

No threat, just a little reminder. After all, we are all tenants, we are all temps.