

PREGO PLUS: BACKGROUND NOTES

TWENTY-SEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME YEAR A

Second Reading Philippians 4: 6–9

This is the third of four sections from Paul's letter to the Philippians, chosen in turn as the Second Reading on four consecutive Sundays. Nicholas King SJ notes how it focuses the attention 'on God, on prayer, and all that is proper for us to think of, and all that we should do' (notes to King's new translation of the New Testament, 2004).

Paul, concerned for his friends' peace of mind and heart, encourages them to regard things positively; to see everything in the light of God's love. He recommends essential ways of living their lives in Christ so as to attain the 'peace of God', from the 'God of peace' (one of Paul's favourite titles for God).

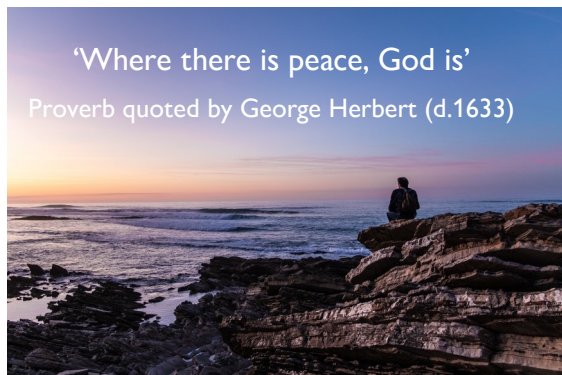
'There is no need to worry ... If you need anything, ask God for it ...'

Aside from the everyday concerns most of us experience, these new Christians in Philippi were also subject to persecution. To alleviate anxiety, their essential need is to pray. Paul encourages them to turn to God in prayer in each and every situation, both in petition and gratitude.

'Fill your minds with everything that is true'

To prevent suffering and hardship defeating them, Paul recommends they focus their attention on all that is 'good and pure', and so of God, leaving no room for thoughts that lead to despair.

'Keep doing all the things you have learnt from me'



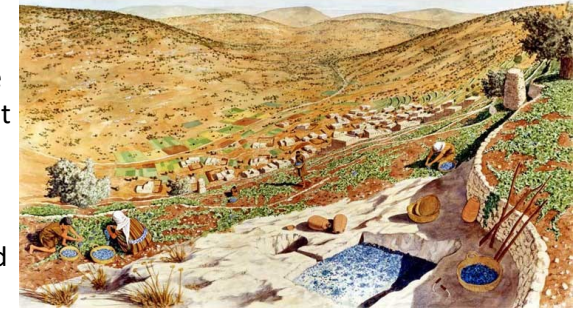
Paul wants the Philippians to remember his word and example, so that it might sustain them in times when he may no longer be with them. He seeks to protect the growing Church, and wishes most especially that they may have peace.

Gospel Matthew 21: 33–43

Jesus is teaching in the Temple in Jerusalem after driving out sellers and money changers (Matt. 21: 12–16). The tension between Jesus and the Pharisees is growing. He tells the chief priests and elders this story in answer to their question: 'What authority have you for acting like this ...?' (v. 23)

The vineyard, the winepress and the tower

These details echo those of the Prophet Isaiah (see today's First Reading). In those days, the winepress was a large area, normally covered by mosaics where the grapes were laid and crushed by the feet of the workers to extract the juice.



The tower provided shelter for the family of the overseer and was used as a look-out to protect the vineyard from thieves and marauders.

'Listen to another parable ...'

This is the third parable involving a vineyard (see Matt. 20: 1–16, & 21: 28–32). For Matthew's audience, this particular story reflected a reality they knew only too well: the discontent expressed by tenants working for absentee landlords. They knew that Jesus's parables held a deeper meaning for them.

'This is the heir... Let us kill him'

The tenants wrongly assume that the owner has died. They knew that if a landowner died without an heir, his land would pass to the first claimant. By killing the heir, they become landowners.

'What will the owner do to those tenants?'

Jesus's question leads the Jews to pronounce their own condemnation.

The Church in Matthew's time

Matthew is writing for Jews who are now realising that their community of believers, the Church, is changing. More and more Gentiles are joining their ranks. This parable is helping them to understand why this is so.

A people who will produce its fruit

The responsibility for running the vineyard – the Kingdom of God – no longer rests with a few leaders (the 'tenants') but with a whole new 'people', a mixed community of Jew and Gentile converts who formed the early Christian Church in the first century AD.