

had the good fortune this past week of being along the coast down near Monterey for a couple days. It was beautiful - sunny, blue skies, cool breeze and the ocean waves. At one point, in the distance, I could see a whale's spouting spray and then, much to my enjoyment, saw the nose come up and down and then, not long after, the whale's tail fin surfacing as it prepared for a dive, to go down into that deep wonderland below. I went to the Monterey Aquarium as well, a remarkable place where one can see all the colors of the rainbow in God's creation. Some of God's creatures are amazingly graceful, like the stingray or jellyfish, others combine grace with playful joy, like the sea otter or the puffin.

As I reflected on the first reading and the gospel, I could not help but consider all these remarkable creatures which the owner of the vineyard universe has prepared. He "*spaded it, cleared it of stones and planted choicest vines.*" He "*put a hedge around it, dug a wine press in it and built a tower.*" The Scriptures say. And when we see what has been prepared for us, on land and sea and sky, so much still not understood or even discovered, it is overwhelming. Along with all of that he has given us each other, humanity as the wise stewards, the tenants of all that God has prepared - to produce fruit for us and for all those to come. When I look at the expanse of it all, I can only give thanks to God. And when I look at all humanity has done with it, I am both in awe and in grief.

The wonders of state parks and aquariums like Monterey, that preserve and help us learn and care for creation, make me stand in awe. The food and medicine produced, the shelter and art and music, the science that has been developed using our minds and all that is around is, make me stand in awe. Yet the massive islands of plastic and garbage that float along the sea, the animal species that disappear yearly, bring me grief. The greed that grabs the world's resources for relatively few, the poverty, the violence, racism, the lack of respect humans can have for one another, for human life itself, and for our Creator - all bring me grief.

Sometimes people will say, "why doesn't God just do something to stop all this?" Yet like that landowner in the parable, God, has tried many things: sending prophets to challenge us over the centuries, teaching us how to live, some listened to for a while, many rejected or

forgotten. God even comes among us, sending his Son, "*thinking, 'They will respect my son.'*" They rejected and killed him too. Yet even then, God's love continued to fill the earth, raised from death itself, filling us with the Holy Spirit, guiding us to what is right and true and just and loving - when we listen. And when we listen we produce much fruit, we share it and we lift one another up!

The challenge before us in the Word today is: are we caring for the vineyard as the landowner intended? Each of us is given a part to play in the vineyard, some larger some smaller, but each of has a part, and each of us has a voice. So rather than, why doesn't God do something, why don't we do something?

When I was chaplain at Bishop Manogue High School one of my colleagues touched me with a very simple action. It was graduation time so we were going to a few house parties of graduates. When we left the first house he brought his plastic fork with him. He carried it with him to all the other places we went, using the same fork to eat with, and then being sure he placed it for recycle when he finished, saying, "I used it, I have to dispose of it correctly." Much and many are entrusted to us. We all have a part to play.

As St. Paul said: "*Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious ... think about these things.*" Put God's love into practice, "*then the God of peace will be with you.*"