

**Lessons for Fifth Sunday in Lent**

**March 13, 2016**

Psalm 126 (*antiphon: v. 3*) ~ *When God brought His people back to Zion from captivity their joy overflowed.*

Isaiah 43:16-21 ~ *God's people settled for exile as the best they could do, but God had better plans for them!*

Philippians 3:(4b-7)8-14 ~ *Although he was good, St. Paul knew he was not good enough to do without Christ.*

Luke 20:9-20 ~ *Jesus' parable became self-fulfilling when the chief priests rejected His message and Him.*

**GATHERING THE TEXTS:** Self-Satisfied or Still Striving?

Sometimes, like the people of Judea, we become satisfied with ourselves and our achievement. Isaiah's words would help push them off the dead center of exile in Babylon to move them toward God's restoration of Jerusalem. St. Paul wrote to people who expected him to claim his own laurels rather than renounce his accomplishments and strive toward the goal of new life in Christ. Jesus' parable of the wicked tenants confronted the teachers of the law and chief priests because in their self-righteousness they were opposing God's plan of salvation.

**PRAYER BEFORE THE SERVICE:** Lord God, I am often uncomfortable with the newness of your re-creating love through Jesus Christ, your Son, who died and rose again that I may live a new life for you. By the power of your Spirit, help me embrace your call to repentance. Help me set aside any righteousness of my own and cling only to the merits of my Savior. Amen.

**STEWARDSHIP THOUGHT:** The vineyard of life is not ours for the taking; we cannot claim it to do with as we wish. It is, however, given to us with all its blessings, like springs of water in the desert, to be used responsibly as our Lord wishes. We depend on the goodness of our God and proclaim it freely for others.

**OFFERING PRAYER:** Gracious Lord of the Vineyard, when You come looking for the produce of our lives, give us humility to depend on the goodness of Christ and wisdom to share that goodness with others. Amen.

Gracious King of the eternal vineyard,  
when you come to bear our produce home,  
give us humble trust in Jesus Christ our Lord  
and wisdom to share the gifts we have on loan. Amen.

**CONVICTION AND COMFORT:** It's hard to ask for help when we have all the answers. Our biggest problem is that we think having all the answers covers all the bases; it doesn't! If we are counting on a righteousness of our own, there are questions we haven't even begun to ask. We will have to answer those questions when the Owner of the vineyard comes. It is better to recognize now that we don't have the answers to life's moral questions so that we learn to depend on Jesus, who answered for us on the cross.