

## Commentary on the Gospel for Wed, Jun 28th 2017

Memorial of Saint Irenaeus, Bishop and Martyr

Talk a Walk

Wine, vineyards, olives, harvest, planting, figs, trees, grain - how many such references are there in scripture? Quickly I came up with over 90. Why so many? They are not filler or attractions for the prospective tourist. They are used primarily as analogies, essential to understanding Jesus' message.

Jesus' followers lived in an agrarian world. Crops and land were their life, their language. If they understood little else, they got this. Relationship and intimacy with the land was crucial. Walking with his followers, Jesus says such as it is with you, your crops and your land, so it is between you and me.

For generations farmers walked their land. They knew their fields – the low spots and the rocky places. They knew the particular fertilizer to support the particular crop. They lived with the soil beneath their fingernails and stuck to the soles of their sandals. Harvesting was hands-on. Workers skillfully selected ripe olives, figs, and grapes. With sensitive fingers and a swift glance they knew if the fruit was ready for picking. Observant and discriminating, the vintner knew his vines – the ones that faithfully produce the sweetest, the most pungent or the reddest of wines. The olive farmer could identify a particular tree by the fragrance of its fruit and touch of its knurly bark. When it was time for a tree, or a vine to be cut down and “thrown into the fire,” there was grief and mourning. Their relationship was an intimate one.

Today, things are different. Machines and seasonal migrant farmers do much of the farming. Farmers don't always live on their land that can be 100s of acres. Very difficult to maintain as personal a relationship much less intimacy.

Possibly we yearn for such intimacy with our land. Possibly we are called to be in relationships caring and honoring nature.

Recently I witnessed a grocery store shopper selecting a peach for an unknown buyer. I watched as the shopper gently picked up one peach after another. Holding each one delicately yet firmly, gently caressing its skin, enjoying its fragrance, admiring the soft shading of pinks, reds, greens and yellows and determining its ripeness. “Why is this so important to you?” “I want to pick out the very best peach I can find. This one! This is the peach for this (unknown) buyer.” There was a bonding of sorts – a caring, a respect for the peach and a caring and respect for the unknown buyer.

In an atmosphere of honor and respect, courting couples get to know each other – walking through each other's story. It takes no time for new mother to physically bond with her baby. Skin to skin, mouth to breast, head to chest and hand in hand they begin together walking through stages of intimacy.

Jesus' message is always about relationship and intimacy. In scripture we hear the agrarian language. However, it is a language we can translate if we walk with it. Be it between the farmer, his land and

his crop, or among us or between Jesus and me or between you and me or between me and the food I eat, or between you and the water you drink, or between a community and its animals, or between our community and our forests and land. The message is the same – honor, respect, nurture, know, and tend– relationship and intimacy - human and nature.

Today, we are invited initially to walk with scripture with 1st century eyes, ears and experiences. Then, walk with scripture in 21st century life -noticing, listening and seeing.

In 97 years my mother never got over the fact that, “(so & so) never takes a walk, never.” She would shake her head, mystified. Never talk a walk

Joan Blandin Howard-Creighton University's Retired