

27th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Thirty years ago the hit movie *Fatal Attraction* told the story of a married man who had an affair with a woman. When he tried to break it off, she turned on him and made his life increasingly difficult. The original ending had him arrested for a crime but exonerated by the woman who finally did the right thing. Test audiences hated it. So the producers paid the writer an additional \$1.5 million to compose an ending in which the man and his wife violently kill the other woman. Test audiences loved that ending, so it stuck. Many Americans enjoy violent entertainments.

We've all probably been in a relationship where one person was deeply in love, and the other was not. Sometimes, when the person not receiving the love realizes that this is going nowhere, they change. Instead of performing acts of kindness or charity to lure the other person, they commit acts of anger or sabotage to punish the other person. We sometimes do this with inanimate objects. On the day you get a new television, computer or car, you are in love with it, but if it breaks down or quits when you need it most, you may yell at it, kick it or hit it, as if the object had willfully turned against you.

Today's first reading is a lyric about a man who had that kind of relationship with a vineyard. He owned a fertile hillside, "he spaded it, cleared it of stones, and planted the choicest vines; within it he built a watchtower, and hewed out a wine press. Then he looked for the crop of grapes, but what it yielded was wild grapes." Rotten grapes. Stinky grapes. So he pledged to "take away its hedge, give it to grazing, break through its wall, let it be trampled! Yes," he says, "I will make it a ruin: it shall not be pruned or hoed, but overgrown with thorns and briars; I will command the clouds not to send rain upon it." It's one of the angriest songs in the bible. Its lyric is a thinly veiled parable on the relationship between God and the house of Israel. God had chosen a people as his own, treated them like a cherished plant, and hoped to reap good fruit from this friendship. But instead of judgment, God saw bloodshed; instead of justice, God heard the outcry of the poor. Jesus tells a similar parable in the gospel to get the attention of the chief priests and elders of the people.

In truth, any of us may be on the bad end of these parables. God has given us love, abilities and opportunities, but we have at times squandered these gifts, like a person who receives the love of another but spurns it. In the worst of times, the rejection of God's love turns into something criminal and violent. We may never understand the motive of a man who turns semiautomatic weapons against a crowd of people enjoying country music. Somehow he had lost his way. Somehow he had learned that violence makes entertainment.

At a time when Americans feel helpless to stop dramatic acts of killing, flagrant acts against human life, we strengthen our unity with one another: the grief we share with those who suffered, the determination we have to live justly, and the hope we maintain for a better future. We can build these by choosing entertainments that build up rather than tear down, by helping those whose lives are emotionally distressed, and by returning to God the love we have so generously received.