

FR. GLENN SUDANO, CFR

We Live in a Castle

*Stories, allegories, and commentaries about
the most wonderful religion in the world.*



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About the Book

“Blue collar ecclesiology” or “kitchen table catechesis” is how the author describes his methodology in presenting some fresh ideas about what is considered to many, a very stale subject. The title of Father Glenn’s first book, *We Live in a Castle*, is taken from one of twelve stories which, like spotlights, illumine one subject at different angles.

The subject of the book? The Church.

The author describes his work as “friendly yet provocative” as he challenges the reader to dig into history and discover a valuable treasure; which he calls “the most wonderful religion in the world.” Father Glenn utilizes creative stories - both allegorical and personal – each with an introduction and commentary. Questions are also provided for personal reflection and group discussion.

No doubt, this book is most especially suited for teachers and students participating in some form of catechesis, especially those who are considering or preparing to enter into full communion with the Catholic Church.

Chapter III

Of all the metaphors and illustrations used in this book, this one – the vineyard – is the best. Why, because it is biblical as Jesus Himself says, “I am the Vine, you are the branches” (John 15:1ff) In our next story entitled, “Ancient Vine, Vintage Wine”, a number of salient points can easily be culled. For example, as the story begins we see a visibly lifeless vineyard, yet in the spring it will be bursting with life. So, what we see often doesn’t tell us the whole story.

Another point to consider calls us to consider the cooperative nature between God and man. Here we speak of the necessity of human responsibility necessary in the divine economy. In short, life must be cultivated by man – progress doesn’t simply “happen” but rather the fruit of human effort. The Church and its mission in and to the world has been entrusted into the hands of people – like you and me. Its fruitfulness very much depends on the effort and industry of individuals. As the saying goes, “you reap what you sow”. This is why there are times and places where the harvest is either over abundant or doesn’t even fill a basket.

To assure a fruitful harvest and full-bodied wine, everyone associated with the vineyard must do their part. Arriving late, leaving early and leaning on shovels in between, is reason number one why so many people experience the Church as a day late and dollar short. In this regard, the vineyards greatest enemy may not be found by those in the popular media but the person looking at you in the bathroom mirror.

So, let’s go to the vineyard. By the way, it’s real cold, so put on your hat and coat – and don’t forget your gloves.

ANCIENT VINE, MYSTIC WINE

It is February; the sky is a slab of gray marble, and looking in every direction there is only one word which applies “glacial”. Sal, looking much like an arctic explorer, trudges on. His heavy boots have become like small freezers numbing his toes which he wiggles every time he stops to take a breath. As far as he can see row upon row of frosted grapevines twist and curl around miles of posts and rusted wire. The howling wind makes the landscape seem eerie. The crusty glazed soil crunches beneath his heavy boots. Occasionally he stops to adjust the wool scarf that is wrapped tightly about his nose and mouth. He pulls his knitted wool cap down to his eyebrows and turns to look at his house in the distance beaconing him on.

His thoughts turn to the miracle of nature, to its constant seasons and transformations. How I it in just six months the sun will be blasting these fields with heat. Then the vineyard will be teeming with life. It will be filled with workers harvesting a bountiful crop sprung from the same vines that today seem well beyond hope.

A winery demands a lot of work and not only in the summer months. It may not always be labor intensive, but it is constant. The winter brings a hiatus for some work but all work. Sal is the owner and he has many tasks inside and out. Creating excellent wine demands time and effort and from his childhood, his grandfather made it quite clear there can be no bountiful harvest without hard work.

Now much of Sal’s life is given over to protecting and pruning the vines. Vigilance is key as no matter what the season, careful observation is necessary. Grapevines have enemies large and small as tiny insects and voracious animals enjoy the sweet and tender buds. Floods and frosts are excellent at their destructive work. Even some of Sal’s laborers can also do their damage for failing to prune and fertilize at the proper times. Yes, Sal must be vigilant, and he always is, for the vineyard is important not only for his family’s livelihood, but for the millions who thoroughly enjoy his wine. In the end, the vineyard is indeed an act of love.

Trudging back to the house, Sal gazes at a small hillock crowned by a majestic beech. The tree is older than vineyard, at least according to his grandfather. The tree was so majestic; it’s noble stature visible throughout the vineyard, thus the name: Copper Beach Vineyards. In his mind’s eye Sal sees himself as a boy, laughing and climbing among the tree’s massive branches, not barren like now but covered with soft, dark leaves. He wonders, “How many hours did I spend climbing that tree and swing from its branches?” Meanwhile the wind howls scattering icy crystals

around him. He decides to change his course; he heads for the Copper Beach and within minutes he is standing besides its elephantine trunk looking at the marbled sky through its barren branches. Although the wooden swing his son enjoys has been removed for the winter, in a flash he is soars high in the air, once again a boy who tries to touch the sky with his toes. His grandfather made the swing - a miracle of fun and childish joy put together with a long piece of rope and a simple pine board. This childhood memory is so sweet it warms Sal's heart – but not his feet, so he turns and makes a sturdy march home.

His grandfather, Salvatore—the man for whom is was named— came from Southern Italy with one suitcase and two nearly empty pockets. His older brothers, Innocente and Humile, had immigrated to America some years earlier. Their journey across the ocean, settling in the city, and establishing a successful winery has become legendary in the family. There appears to be no lack of stories about the three brothers from Calabria. Although, his two uncles are only a faded memory, his grandpa is only a thought – and a prayer – away. Sal wants to write a book about his grandfather as an heirloom for his own children and their own.

Sal is slowly approaching the family homestead, a stone and wood structure built by the three brothers. Like many Europeans, building was in their blood; and as the vineyard expanded, so did the house. The deep wrap-around porch, the floor-to-ceiling windows, the oak paneling and stone fireplace give the house a definitive hunting lodge look. Sal knows every inch of both the basement and attic as he can't recall one summer not spent with his grandparents. Grandma was a wonderful woman who sadly died too early. Although her leaving was painful, now all that is left are luminous memories. Indeed, her memory is retained in the many watercolors which decorate each room of the house. Salvatore never remarried; after his wife's death the vineyard and his grandchildren –especially his namesake—were his only loves.

Sal crosses the edge of the field, then turns up the wide gravel driveway which leads uphill to the house. The smoking chimney and the bright, frosted windows make coming home special during the winter months. He walks into the warm and oak-scented living room and is immediately greeted by his golden retriever. Everything inside said, "You're home."

Pulling off his coat and sweater and everything that was cold and wet on his body, Sal almost throws himself onto the couch. The stone hearth is only a few feet away, so he stretches out his legs, letting the heat restore life to his numb toes. The flames dance in the fireplace and Sal's eyes slowly close. As he gives himself over to sleep and to dreams, his world changes, the summer has come and grandpa is all smiles.

“Sally, let’s take a walk”, his grandfather shouts, looking up from the base of the beech tree. As Sal is only eight, everything unknown and unexpected excites him. At that age, everything in life is an ongoing adventure. He scurries across a branch and begins to make his way down the copper beech’s thick grey trunk. Only his grandfather called him “Sally” - a diminutive like Billy or Johnny. To Sal it never sounded like a girl’s name, as Italians accent the last syllable – Sal-lee. Sal runs to his grandfather, who takes him by the hand. “Come with me,” he said with widened eyes, “I want to show you something.”

His grandfather points to a path and little Sal follows without a word. As they enter upon the path, his grandfather says, Stay close and follow me!”

The walk is a long and goes straight uphill. Finally, Sal sees a bench at the top of the hill. Grandfather and grandson sit and look in the direction from which they came. The vineyard is spread out before him.

“You can see for miles!” Sal yells, shading his eyes from the sun.

“Sally, everything you can see is the family’s; the vineyard was here before we came to this country. Its history is not just old but ancient. The old man and young boy looked down at the vineyard in the summer sun, as birds swooped and sung around them. Sal wished he could stay there with his grandfather forever.

After a long and deep silence, his grandfather begins to speak again: “Sally, would you believe this entire vineyard began with just one slip of a vine. In fact, it took root and grew so quickly that it surprised everyone. As now, the vineyard had its enemies very early on. Many attempts were made to uproot the vine, but they couldn’t. This is hard to understand why this is as the wine produced from this vineyard is loved by so many. This is why it is all important you understand you must be willing to sacrifice yourself for these vines. Sally, you must be willing to sacrifice . . . everything.”

“Sally, this vineyard our own, but it is ours only for a lifetime. Many other people worked hard to expand its borders, in fact, many died doing this. Many fought to save the vines from floods – even from fires. Perhaps none of these knew what they would face in the lifetime – and neither will you. Do you understand what I saying, Sally?”

At this point, Salvatore takes his grandson’s hand and they walk back down the hill. Finally they stand in the vineyard again, surrounded by leaves and heavy clusters of grapes. Salvatore kneels on one knee and says, “Sally, look at this”. Spreading apart the leaves and pointing to the thick grapevine he asks, “How does this vine appear to you? What does it look

like?” The boy responds, “Well, it’s dry and rough like a snake or a old twisted rag.” His grandfather smiles, Sal beams. “Excellent! Now, would you say it’s beautiful or ugly?” Without a thought Sal shouts: “It’s ugly – like I said an old, dry, twisted rag?” “Exactly!” Salvatore says as he pulls a pen knife out of his pocket, opens it, and snips off of a cluster of grapes. “Now, how would you describe this cluster of grapes?” Sal, thought for a moment and said, “Well...they’re sort of pretty...soft.... juicy....probably tastes sweet.” His grandfather, dangling the cluster before his eyes said, “Sally, see the shape? Artists call it symmetry. Notice it’s wide at the top and tapered to a point on the bottom.” So here’s a lesson. Widening his eyes and pointing to the cluster, he said: “So what is gnarled and ugly can give us something symmetrical, beautiful and delicious!”

“Let’s go, I have to show you something else”. He hands the cluster of grapes to Sal, and says “*Mangia!*” Sal smiles and begins popping the grapes into his mouth as the pair walk through the vineyard. They walk and walk and Sal is amazed to see some vines lush and bursting with clusters, while others had limp, yellow leaves and no fruit at all. After many miles, their journey ends in a deep gully where a huge root grows out of an even larger rock. Without taking his eyes off the sight Salvatore says: “Sally, here is where the vineyard begins. Remember this, many a man has tried to uproot the vine from the rock, but they only injured themselves”. With that, Salvatore bends down, picks up his grandson and holds him in his arms. Weary from the long walk, Sal is gently carried home.

A loud “pop!” from the fireplace wakes Sal. The room is dark, as the fire is reduced to a pile of iridescent coals. He runs his hands through his hair and wonders how long he has been asleep. Sal picks up a hunk of oak, which he tosses into the fire. He leans back into the couch in order to cull his dream the surface. As he ponders the pleasant unexpected excursion, he remembers the plaque he made many years ago and which his grandfather proudly displayed in his office.

The plaque was wooden and carefully lathed to resemble an ancient scroll. On it was inscribed sayings he had gleaned from the many letters they had exchanged when away at college. Sal immediately got up and went to the office and removed the plaque from the wall. As he carried it to the couch, he paused to pick up a glass and a bottle of good red wine. After pouring a glass, Sal sits back to look closely at the plaque to read and to remember.

Lessons from the Vineyard

This vineyard is not yours forever, but is your responsibility now. You must do all you can to preserve it and pass it down the next generation. Those who have labored well and who have labored little are both justly rewarded for their efforts. Be diligent!

As the sun and rain befriend the fields to make them fruitful, it is man who can render them fruitless. Remember, not every enemy is hidden under the cover of night. Be vigilant!

The vineyard is larger than you'll ever know. So, when everything in your sight is withered and rotten, do know beyond your sight acres are heavy with a rich and abundant harvest. Be hopeful!

The vine is gnarled, hard, and dry indeed. It was designed thus so to stay strong in every deadly storm and harsh season. Never consider the twisted vine, but rather the sweet wine. Be wise!

A bountiful yield and wonderful wine are both guaranteed only when these ingredients are used: humble obedience, selfless service, and diligent work. Be faithful!

The fire crackled, and looking out the window Sal noticed the snow had begun to fall. Placing the plaque next to him, he reaches for the wine bottle and admires its label. His insides swell with a certain pride seeing the family insignia. On the label was his grandmother's watercolor of the copper beech; and in its branches, three ornate letters: "I" for Innocente, "H" for Humile, and "S" for Salvatore. Beneath these was a flowing scroll inscribed in Latin: "*Fructum vitis et operis manuum hominum*". "Fruit of the vine and work of human hands."

Sal sets the bottle down. Picking up his glass, he raises it towards the fireplace. He swirls the wine about; in the firelight it appears like blood all aglow. Outside, the snow swirls and the wind whistles around the seemingly lifeless vines on their wooden posts. Sal smiles and sips the wine, savoring its incredible sweetness. "And all this" - he whispers to the glass - "from a dry and twisted rag."

AS I SEE IT

The image of the vine doesn't simply work well; it works immanently well. We only touched on some of the reasons in the introduction. Yet, I would be remiss if I did not present the very words of Jesus which actually bring us to the crux of this book. The quote is taken from the 15th Chapter of the gospel of Saint John. "I am the Vine and you are the branches he who abides in me and I in him will bear abundant fruit....."

In this we have a vineyard which is lovingly tended by Sal who inherited the winery business from his grandfather. The vineyard is quite vast extending itself in almost every direction. As mentioned above, it is a most appropriate metaphor for the Church for many reasons. One of which is work – the vineyard must continually be maintained; it doesn't simply produce its fruit without pruning, grafting, inspecting, and feeding. Remember the story of Adam and Eve – after the fall, to get his bread Adam had to break his back!

Like a vine, the apostolic Church is rooted in history. We know the Church's beginnings – where it began, with whom it began, and how it began to spread. For anyone who is serious in answering some tough questions about the nature and mission of the Church must be somewhat conversant with the history of the Church. It is essential that one rewind the tape and start from the beginning by reading the New Testament, most particularly, the Acts of the Apostles. After which it is important to become familiar with the early apologists and bishops – the Fathers of the Church. While many non-Catholic Christians have read Saint Augustine, few have read the powerful sermons of the one who converted him; namely, Saint Ambrose. In short, follow the vine back in time to the beginning.

The Church has indeed survived two millennia. It has gone through many periods of magnificent growth and productivity—centuries that overflowed with saints, great spiritual writers, and artists, times when it seemed that that the awareness of God penetrated not just to the depths of people's souls but to the depths of whole cultures. However, there have been – and will continue to be – some dark and cold winters when all that one sees appear lifeless – miles of lifeless tangles of vines hanging on rusted wire. Perhaps you think we live in such a time, and perhaps you are right.

Despite the frigid and lunar landscape of Siberia, we cannot forget there is a place called San Diego. In life, we all have to step back and see the whole picture. Even a drop of water when viewed too close appears quite frightening. Real close harmless little lizards appear as large deadly

dinosaurs. With really big things, we really have to step back. We must be careful not to judge the whole by its parts; the saying is true: “A half truth is a whole lie”. The Church is big -very big – and for this reason almost anything you say about it can be considered true. So, in order for us to understand the reality of something, we must get a God’s-eye view – looking not at the Church here and now, but the Church everywhere and in every time.

Finally, we consider the product – the vintage wine. When some degrade and demonize the vineyard, they often forget the immense good it produces. For which works should we condemn the Church? The innumerable number of schools, colleges, universities, hospitals, nursing facilities, medical clinics, food and medicine dispensaries, orphanages, social services to the poor, disabled, and mentally ill – not to mention the thousands of clergy and religious dedicated to the spiritual and material needs of others despite race, color, or creed. Take what we see today and add it to the centuries that have preceded us. Even as Jesus said in Holy Writ: “For which of my good works do you condemn me?”

So, to those who complain, criticize and condemn, I simply say, “Don’t curse the vine while you enjoy the wine.”

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