As Thomas Edison once said, “I haven’t failed, I’ve just found 10,000 ways that don’t work.” And how true that is; for whether we are working in a garden and it’s just not producing fruit, like we have in the first reading, or trying with other things in life, how often can things seem to be fruitless.

But the thing of it is, just as Edison persisted and became an incredible inventor of things that did in fact work, far greater than this is God who keeps believing in us, knowing that with time our spiritual garden can grow; and this God also invites us to work in the gardens of the souls of others as well, for when we work with Him there can be a bountiful harvest where we least expected it.

Servant of God Elisabeth Leseur certainly should have had every reason to think that her husband would never find God in his life. He was an atheist; and she did not plan on marrying an atheist. She was raised in a loving Christian home in France, and she wanted the same for her future children.

When she met Felix Leseur and fell in love, she assumed that their live among the intellectual elite of Paris would be a Christian life, that they’d have children and raise them Catholic. Elisabeth got the high society, the

salons held in their elegant Paris home, the trips all over Europe and North Africa, but faith had no part in their life as a couple. Felix was an atheist, but he promised Elisabeth that he wouldn't try to prevent her from practicing her faith, and Elisabeth was certain that he would eventually come around.

He didn't and was quite open about his convictions: publishing anticlerical articles, criticizing the Church, and encouraging his friends to join him in mocking Elisabeth's faith. In all other ways he was an excellent husband; the two loved each other deeply, and Felix was generally kind and thoughtful. But in matters of faith, he was entrenched in his lack of it.

For a time, his constant picking at Elisabeth's faith worked. Overwhelmed, she fell away from the Church and abandoned her relationship with God. But when Felix pressed Elisabeth, a very smart woman who enjoyed reading, to read various atheistic works, she began to find holes in the arguments. This resulted in a profound conversion of heart when Elisabeth was 32. Felix had unintentionally pushed her back toward faith, and she would not be drawn away again.

A journaler from her youth, Elisabeth began recording her spiritual insights. She resolved to pray hard for Felix - indeed to make prayer for his conversion the primary focus of her life. It was clear to her that argument would be to no avail. Felix wasn't the type to be convinced, not once his mind was made up. So, Elisabeth wouldn't fight him. She would live for Jesus, as a sacrifice offered for Felix, and trust God to handle the rest.

Even Felix's attacks on her faith were ammunition in the long war Elisabeth was waging for his soul. When he laughed at her "superstitions" or rolled his eyes at Elisabeth's pious practices, she had one more thing to offer up for his salvation. It pained her to imagine heaven without him, the man whose antagonism toward her faith couldn't destroy the deep love she had for him. But she trusted that God would answer her sincere prayers. She never lost hope, not through decades of infertility, chronic illness, spiritual loneliness in a marriage to a man she loved so much, or even her final battle with cancer. She had offered her life in sacrifice for Felix's soul, and she trusted that if God was taking her home to himself, Felix would be saved. At the time of her death, she had no fear - she believed with absolute certainty that Felix would become a Christian.

But her death only made Felix more hostile to God as he blamed God for her death. He was unmoved by the crowds that attended her funeral, people Elisabeth had loved and served when she had been relatively healthy and, in those years, when she had been homebound. Even reading her diaries didn't immediately penetrate the hardness of his heart. Instead, Felix pored over her words of love for the Lord (and intercession for her husband) and determined to prove his late wife wrong once and for all. He decided to go to Lourdes to expose it all as a fraud.

But what he hadn't counted on was grace. When he arrived in Lourdes, Elisabeth's diaries in tow, he found himself overwhelmed by a sense of God's presence and Elisabeth's as well. Elisabeth's lifelong prayer had at last been answered. So converted was her husband that he decided to become a Dominican priest. Once ordained, he spent most of his priesthood working to spread the message of his wife's life: her heart poured out in the merciful love for him, a hostile unbeliever.

Elisabeth never gave up on Felix, and God never gives up on us.

In our first reading this week, we hear about a vineyard; the prophet refers to a friend who works so hard and all that comes forth are wild grapes, which won't produce wine. The friend is God; the vineyard is the holy people of Israel. The people are meant to produce wine that will lift up and be for the world. God has also then the spading and clearing and planting to lift up Israel. But still what has happened? The wild grapes symbolize how the people have turned away through idolatry and worshipping other gods.

What's the response of God to all this? Well part of it is allowing the consequences of the action to unfold - taking away the hedge and letting it be trampled. God allows one's will to be done.

But when Jesus picks up with this parable, we have a new twist - people being sent into the vineyard to collect rent but being attacked including the son who is kicked out and killed.

If we don't know the rest of the story, it would be a little bit depressing. But let's get to the end of the story - the stone that the builders rejected has

become the cornerstone. Yes, we are wicked, we've killed the Son, and we have wild grapes. But through it all, God has not given up on us.

So, for us, three things to think about are:

For one, how do we work at being in the vineyard? The way to greatness requires work. There was once a young man, Lenny, who was 13 years old hadn't written a word on the exam page in front of him; he looked at a blank page for 2 hours. A merciful instructor collected his test, or lack thereof along with the rest. Surely, he'd have to go home and take a menial job failing the entrance exam for his new school. But as it turned out, there was room in the lower post class, the class for stupid boys as it was casually called. But that lasted 3 months. Lenny's performance grew steadily worse as the term passed, and he was so regular in his irregularity that teachers really don't know what to do with him. He would be a bit rebellious. The boy remained at the bottom of his class year in and year out.

It was Lenny's father who came up with possible solution to his son's restless academic failure; maybe it would be best if Lenny entered the less demanding program in the school that would prepare students for the army.

After all he'd never get into a university. So, Lenny struggled through his new inferior curriculum; his family got tutors to ensure his eventual success. And so, he took a military school entrance exam, and he failed at 17 years of age. When at 18 he did the same, he failed. His parents resigned to him being a clerk or a bean counter or working stiff. His father, Lord Randolph, did have connections as he was a conservative party politician. Years later Lenny looked back on his school days with understandable bitterness; a somber gray patch on the journey through life. "It is not pleasant to feel oneself so outclassed and left behind at the very beginning of the race." He'd say, "I'm all for the public schools but I'd never want to go there again."

He took a third exam and, on that third try, he passed, in part because he gambled and won. He was to memorize 25 maps. He picked one and that showed up on the exam. School is a good thing, but not the only thing that is a measure of what a boy will become. He was poor at math though so he couldn't join the artillery and engineers, and on a later exam he did not qualify for the infantry. He did, however, qualify for the calvary. At the age of 20 he graduated at the top of his class.

In his 20's, he'd go on to become a soldier but also a war correspondent. He'd go to Cuba, and to the Sudan writing for major publications. He'd be shot at, spend a month as a POW before escaping and writing a book about it. By 25 he was a veteran, an author, a famous war hero, and decided to run for election as a member of Parliament. And so began his political career.

Lenny was at the bottom of his class, but hard work and a bit of luck caused him to turn that around within a few years. But most don't know him as Lenny; it was his middle name that people called him. His full name was Winston Leonard Spencer Churchill.

What did he do? He worked over and over again and never gave up tending his vineyard. We've been given so much from God, but that requires a response. So, if we are cultivated by God, how then do we tend the vineyard? Do we respond to it by being a person who tries to grow in holiness by doing battle with our sins. Do we respond to it by making sure we show respect for others in many ways, from not hating someone over politics to not objectifying the human body of people we do not know by living a chaste life? You see we can't just say "this is good enough" if we

are doing one thing well. That's great - but if you go to Mass and are nice to people but then are battling some sin over and over again you just ignore, or blowing up at people you don't like, or not being the kind of person you need to be for your family, each one of these is a wild grape that needs to go - because just a small amount can impact the entire vineyard.

Secondly, we must remember it's not our vineyard. The tenants want to seize control, and in Jesus' parable, the issue is they won't hand over any fruit. So, they take control by violence. Sometimes as humans we get a bit of an inflated ego; to borrow from "Top Gun" your ego is writing checks your body can't cash, I'd just change "body" to "soul," because pride can really impact us. If God is really the center of our lives and not just a song we sing, we listen to Him. We listen to the Church. And we listen to the others who come into the vineyard who are there to guide us and give us help. It sure took a long time, but Felix did just that - he went to Lourdes a prideful man but was converted, through Mary, but also through the words of Elisabeth in her diary and in their marriage. If you're here today you certainly believe in God, that's a first step - but we must remember that spiritual growth is life long, for just as weeds grow every year in a garden and require work each season, the same is true with our spiritual garden.

And lastly, we can look at the world and give up and see all the vile grapes, and it can be overwhelming. It's tough to see so many things in the world, but we all feel it. But if Jesus is our cornerstone, we can not only cultivate our garden with Him but also do so much in the world too. So, on our part, may we never give up speaking about our faith, living it out, praying for those who have fallen away. We must invite people to know God through our word and actions. That's especially tough with those closest to us, but when they see our actions and grace that has emerged from how we've lived, what amazing things can emerge from seemingly the most barren of gardens.

It may take time and work, but let us continue through life by working in the vineyard with the tools the owner has given us, knowing that while it may take time and toil, we can truly prepare for the Owner when we meet Him one day a bountiful harvest of choice grapes from our time in His Garden, and having brought others to work with us in it through having a belief in them as God has believed in us.