

Scripture Study

Twenty-seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time – Cycle A



Opening prayer

Isaiah 5:1-7

(Ps 80:9, 12-16, 19-20)

Philippians 4:6-9

Matthew 21:33-43

Overview of the Gospel:

- We take up this Sunday's Gospel where we left off last Sunday: Jesus has just finished relating the parable of the two sons in the vineyard. The Jewish leaders he is addressing, knowing Jesus was speaking of them, resolve to destroy him (Matthew 21:45-46). Jesus knows this and thus addresses another parable to them, also about a vineyard.
- This parable is also an *allegory*, that is, each person, group and place stands for something else. It is similar to the Nathan's allegory to King David (2 Samuel 12:1-10).
- By this allegory, Jesus confronts his listeners with the fact that God has given his people every blessing imaginable and entrusted their leaders to take care of what, ultimately, belongs to him. When he sent his messengers to set them straight when they strayed, they refused to listen. When one greater than all the messengers came to set things right, they recognized his threat to their authority (verse 38; Matthew 12:14; 26:3ff; John 11:47-53).
- Jesus prophesies that the kingdom will be taken away from them and given to those who give the Lord "produce at the proper time" (verses 41, 43)— i.e., the believing Jews and the Gentiles who will make up the Church and perform the good works expected by God (Matthew 3:8-10; 16:17-19; Galatians 6:16).

Questions:

- In the 1st Reading, who is the prophet's "friend"? How can we tell he owns and cares about the vineyard? Is he within his rights to allow the wild and unproductive field to go its own way and to start over again?
- In Jesus' parable, who (or what) is represented as the landowner? The vineyard? The tenants? The servants? The son?
- In the 2nd Reading, what are the things that St. Paul tells will help us stay focused on God?
- What corresponds to the son's death? To the removal of the wretched tenants?
- At whom does Jesus direct this parable (and those we heard on the previous two Sundays)? Why don't they arrest him (verses 45-46)? Why don't they repent and follow him?
- At different times in your life, with what attitude have you received Jesus? Have you ever felt you *deserved* God's kingdom?
- In your life, is Jesus like a *cornerstone* (the foundation of your building)? Or is he like a *millstone* (a weight that drags you down)? In what ways?
- With whom do you identify in this story? Why?

Catechism of the Catholic Church: §§ 443, 755—756

Closing prayer

If we are trying to have Christ as our king we must be consistent. We must start by giving him our heart. Not to do that and still talk about the kingdom of Christ would be completely hollow.

--St Josemaria Escriva

Remember to read and meditate on the daily Mass readings!

“The Kingdom Will Be Taken From You”

Scripture: *Matthew 21:33-43*

"Hear another parable. There was a householder who planted a vineyard, and set a hedge around it, and dug a wine press in it, and built a tower, and let it out to tenants, and went into another country. When the season of fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants, to get his fruit; and the tenants took his servants and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. Again he sent other servants, more than the first; and they did the same to them. Afterward he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him and have his inheritance.' And they took him and cast him out of the vineyard, and killed him. When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" They said to him, "He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons." Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the scriptures: 'The very stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner; this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes'? Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation producing the fruits of it."

Meditation: What can a parable about the mismanagement of a vineyard tell us about the kingdom of God? Jesus' audience could easily identify with the story about an absentee landlord and



his not-so-good tenants. The hills of Galilee were lined with numerous vineyards, and it was quite common for the owners to let out their estates to tenants. Many did it because they could make a lot of money easily by collecting high rent from their tenants. Their wealthy status allowed them to travel and own houses in other places. Jesus' story, however, was unsettling to some of his audience. Why did the scribes and Pharisees in particular feel offended? Jesus' parable contained both a prophetic message and a warning to the religious community and its leaders. Isaiah had spoken of the house of Israel as "the vineyard of the Lord" (Isaiah 5:7). Isaiah warned his people that their unfaithfulness would yield bad fruit if they did not repent and change. Jesus' listeners would likely understand this parable as a healthy reminder that God will in due time root out bad fruit and put an end to rebellion.

What does Jesus' parable tell us about God and the way he deals with his people? First, it tells us of God's generosity and trust. The vineyard is well equipped with everything the tenants need. The owner went away and left the vineyard in the hands of the tenants. God likewise trusts us enough to give us freedom to run life as we choose. This parable also tells us of God's patience and justice. Not once, but many times he forgives the tenants

their debts. But while the tenants take advantage of the owner's patience, his judgment and justice prevail in the end.

Jesus foretold both his death and his ultimate triumph. He knew he would be rejected by his own people and be killed, but he also knew that would not be the end. After rejection would come glory – the glory of resurrection and ascension to the right hand of the Father. The Lord continues to bless his people today with the gift of his kingdom. And he promises that we will bear much fruit if we abide in him and remain faithful to him (see John 15:1-11). He entrusts each of us with his gifts and grace and he gives each of us a particular work to do in his vineyard—the body of Christ. He promises that our labor, especially what we do for him, will not be in vain if we persevere with faith to the end (see 1 Corinthians 15:58). We can expect trials and difficulties as we labor for the Lord, and even persecution from those who oppose God's kingdom. But in the end we will see triumph. Do you labor for the Lord with joyful hope and with confidence in his victory?

"Thank you, Lord Jesus Christ, for all the benefits which you have given us; for all the pains and insults which you have borne for us. O most merciful redeemer, friend, and brother, may we know you more clearly, love you more dearly, and follow you more nearly, for your own sake." (prayer of St. Richard of Chichester, 13th century)