

27th Ordinary Sunday, October 8, 2017

A second grade kid came home from school and told his parents that he got second prize in the running race. His parents were so happy and they celebrated it with an ice cream party. While they were having the ice cream his father asked him how many kids ran the race. He said just two. Any parent would be happy to see their children being successful in their life. Through the readings today God tells us that he would be happy and reward us if we produce good fruit. If we bear bad or no fruit, we are bringing destruction upon ourselves.

In the first reading of today Prophet Isaiah uses the image of the vineyard. It was carefully laid out and cared for by its owner, who is God. God loved the chosen people and granted special protection and privileges to them. These chosen people of Isaiah's day were well aware of all that God had done for them in the past. Under this image of the wine-grower who had done everything he could do to make his vineyard fertile and productive, the prophet describes God's care for and interest in his chosen people. This vineyard of God produces wild fruit, instead of real grapes, not fit to produce wine. And so God decides to abandon the vineyard altogether. With its walls torn down, animals are free to graze in it. In time without care and water it will be overgrown with thorns and bushes.

In the same way the people had failed to respond to God who had done so much for them. They produced bloodshed instead of justice, and a rebellious outcry in place of true obedience. This is the detail of the song Isaiah in the first reading. God wanted the people of Israel to serve the highest ideals of heaven. Instead they pursued earthly interests through oppression and violence.

In today's Gospel we have the parable of the vineyard and the wicked tenants. Jesus tells this story to his opponents, namely the Chief Priests and the Elders of the people, to show them that even though they are God's chosen people from the beginning, they have forfeited any claim to the new kingdom of God because of their disloyalty and disobedience to him. The purpose of the parable is as we find it in the gospel of Matthew to show that the death of Jesus at the hands of his opponents is consistent with the way God's messengers have been treated down the centuries.

The tenants were given a vineyard by the owner to cultivate. But they claimed it as their own and refused not only to give any return to the true owner. They even murdered his own son who had come to them on behalf of his father. The Jews had totally failed in their task to prepare for the Messiah but instead they not only refused to listen to him, but chose to destroy him. The killing of the son "outside the city" is a clear reference to Jesus dying on the cross outside the walls of

Jerusalem. Hence the chosen people will be replaced by other nations who will give proper returns to the owner.

Two leading thoughts come to our mind after listening to the parable of today. First we see the infinite goodness, patience and the mercy of God in his dealing with humankind. And secondly, the unsounded depth of wickedness and ingratitude to which man can sink. To his chosen people God had given every good thing indicated in the image of the fertile vineyard: his revelation, protection, new land at Canaan and the promise of the messiah. But they had other plans and they wanted a kingdom on earth. Yet God was patient with them and again and again pardoned their infidelities. However, when the prophets were sent to them as his messengers they refused to accept them and did not listen to their warnings. Finally, the landowner, God, sent His only beloved Son Jesus to them, saying, "They will respect my Son." Rather than believing and accepting the teachings of Jesus as the Son of God and the promised Messiah, the chief priests and the Pharisees plotted against Him also and killed Him. They were afraid that the presence of Jesus would control their power and authority. Today, we are the tenants in the vineyard. God expects us to produce fruit that will endure. We are specially privileged, by baptism, to be called to work in the Lord's vineyard. Time and again we are invited to gather together to hear the Gospel message and to make it part of our lives. This week, let us all take a few moments to review our status before God, asking ourselves if we will inherit the Kingdom of God.

We—the new Israel, the Church, the world—are not the owners of this vineyard; we are tenants. One of the most fundamental spiritual mistakes we can make is to think that we own the world. We are tenants, entrusted with the responsibility of caring for it, but everything that we have and are is on loan. Our lives are not about us.

Christ is God's judgment. We are all under his judgment. In the measure that we refuse to listen to him, we place our tenancy in jeopardy. And so the great question that arises from this parable: "how am I using the gifts that God gave me for God's purposes? My money? My time? My talents? My creativity? My relationships?" All is for God, and thus all is under God's judgment.