

27th Sunday of the Year A

First Reading Isaiah 5:1-7

Let me sing to my friend the song of his love for his vineyard. My friend had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. He dug the soil, cleared it of stones, and planted choice vines in it. In the middle he built a tower, he dug a press there too. He expected it to yield grapes, but sour grapes were all that it gave. And now, inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, I ask you to judge between my vineyard and me. What could I have done for my vineyard that I have not done? I expected it to yield grapes. Why did it yield sour grapes instead? Very well, I will tell you what I am going to do to my vineyard: I will take away its hedge for it to be grazed on, and knock down its wall for it to be trampled on. I will lay it waste, unpruned, undug; overgrown by the briar and the thorn. I will command the clouds to rain no rain on it. Yes, the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the House of Israel, and the men of Judah that chosen plant. He expected justice, but found bloodshed, integrity, but only a cry of distress.

Second Reading Philippians 4:6-9

There is no need to worry; but if there is anything you need, pray for it, asking God for it with prayer and thanksgiving, and that peace of God, which is so much greater than we can understand, will guard your hearts and your thoughts, in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers and sisters, fill your minds with everything that is true, everything that is noble, everything that is good and pure, everything that we love and honour, and everything that can be thought virtuous or worthy of praise. Keep doing all the things that you learnt from me and have been taught by me and have heard or seen that I do. Then the God of peace will be with you.

Gospel Matthew 21:33-44

Jesus said to the chief priests and the elders of the people, "Listen to another parable. There was a man, a landowner, who planted a vineyard; he fenced it round, dug a winepress in it and built a tower; then he leased it to tenants and went abroad. When vintage time drew near he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his produce. But the tenants seized his servants, thrashed one, killed another and stoned a third. Next he sent some more servants, this time a larger number, and they dealt with them in the same way. Finally he sent his son to them. 'They will respect my son,' he said. But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, 'This is the heir. Come on, let us kill him and take over his inheritance.' So they seized him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?"

They answered, "He will bring those wretches to a wretched end and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will deliver the produce to him when the season arrives." Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the scriptures: 'It was the stone rejected by the builders that became the keystone. This was the Lord's doing and it is wonderful to see? I tell you, then, that the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit.'"

Meditation

The parable of the murderous tenants describes a radical crisis in the life of the Messiah and in the history of salvation. Having spoken tirelessly to those responsible for the vineyard of Israel, God finally appeals to them through his Son. With unequalled authority, Jesus announces the approach of the harvest of the last times. Earth must yield its fruit. The people of God must welcome their Messiah! But the children are no better than their ancestors. Just as the latter rejected the just ones and the prophets, so also the scribes and Pharisees prepare to murder the heir to God's beloved vineyard. The people of the promise run the risk of rejecting their election, of breaking the covenant through which God's plan was to be realized. Jesus uses this parable as a clear proclamation of his death. He came into the world and his own people did not receive him. They finally rejected the Son and heir and even crucified him outside the city. The parable ends with a prophetic threat: the Church of the risen One will soon take up the mission once laid upon Israel. Matthew expresses the conviction that this new people will bring the vineyard to fruit.

Yet these new tenants must not in their turn disappoint the Lord who never ceases to demand the fruit of his vineyard. We cannot remind ourselves enough that the Church is built on the stone that was rejected. Called together by this outcast, we must open ourselves to the banished of this world and make choices which may be punished by death outside the walls. If not, then "the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that will yield a rich harvest."