

49 Twenty-seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time Year A October 8, 2017
Isaiah 5:1-7 Psalm 80 Philippians 4:6-9 Matthew 21:33-43

Today's Gospel of St. Matthew is a continuation of last week's parable that reveals how the religious leaders fail to take *personal responsibility* to look after the Chosen People of God. He reveals the truth about who the chief priests and elders are through the parable about the landowner who leases his vineyard to some tenants.

The people of Israel have been treated in a privilege manner by God. But privilege brings responsibility. The chief priests and elders failed God. Yet God is not disappointed for His own sake. Rather He is disappointed because His people have squandered the blessings He wants them to enjoy. Sadly, the vineyard is destined to become a wilderness.

What sort of fruits did God expect from His people? God looks for peace from His people, and got war; for true worship, and got idolatry; for justice in their dealings with one another, and got injustice, corruption, and exploitation of the poor and weak. God looks for goodness from His people, and got evil; for caring and sharing, and got greed, for humility, and got pride. And lastly, God looks for wise godly living, and got a pagan lifestyle. This to some extent is our story too.

The story of the wicked tenants is an allegory, that is, a story of salvation history. God, the owner of the vineyard, leaves His people in the care and protection of the chief priests and elders. Their *personal responsibility* is to bring the people fruitfulness in knowing, loving, and obeying God's commandments so they may continue to enjoy His love and protection.

From time to time God sends His prophets to remind the people of this purpose, but the prophets are abused, rejected, and even murdered. Finally, God sends His only Son, but He too is beaten and put to death. What the tenants did was ugly and sinful.

So Jesus asks a question, "If you were the owner of the vineyard, what would you do to those tenants?" Caught up in the story, the chief priests and elders reply, we "would put those wretches to a miserable death, and lease the vineyard to other tenants who would give him the produce at the harvest time."

Jesus is telling the chief priests and elders that it is they who are the tenants in the parable. Jesus says that because of their crimes, their sins, the vineyard of God, which is His Kingdom on earth, will be taken from them. Thus a new building comes into being, the new People of God. Jesus, the one whom they rejected and killed is the cornerstone of this new building, the Catholic Church.

It does not take a great deal of imagination to see ourselves in this parable. In the larger picture of community, each of us is a tenant, cultivating a small portion of Jesus' vineyard, His Church. The Church is the vineyard Christ planted and tended with such care that He gave His life for it. He looks to us as His followers, the tenants of His vineyard, to produce good fruit.

As tenants we are *personally responsible* for our Church community. When harvest time arrives we are expected to produce the fruits of right living, of loving, sharing and showing forth the charity of the Gospel in our daily lives and continuing Jesus' mission. By doing this we put into practice during the week what we profess to believe at our Sunday celebration of the Mass. During the week, we can ask ourselves, "How am I tending the faith of our community?" or "How am I serving Jesus in His Church?"

As well, we must take *personal responsibility* of ourselves. Many people become poor tenants or caretakers of their souls by rejecting God through their sins. God has given us the freedom of choice to tend our souls with God's love and grace and thus produce good grapes or to sin and produce sour grapes. Sin is an evil from which we can be rescued only by God's loving forgiveness.

Jesus lovingly gave us the Sacrament of Reconciliation, or Confession, in which people can be absolved from their sins and become reunited with God. Sadly, much like the tenants in the parable, many people today reject Jesus' Sacrament of Reconciliation. They slowly let sin take over their souls, their whole way of life. These people choke the love of God in their souls through sin until their souls are dead.

A time will come when each person will be accountable to God as to whether they were good or bad tenants of their soul. When was the last time you

went to Confession to cleanse your soul? To reject this Sacrament is to reject Jesus' who died to give us this gift of reconciliation.

As we heard in the parable, the tenant did not own the vineyard. Rather it is God who owns the vineyard we know as the Catholic Church and He wants good produce to come from it. Likewise, we do not own our souls or our bodies. It is Jesus who owns them and He wants good produce to come forth from us. St. Paul writes: "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?" (1Corinthians 6:19-20).

Jesus asks that we be faithful to tending to our soul and tending to our Church, our family, and our community. Attending Mass, listening to God's Word, praying for God's assistance, receiving Jesus in the Holy Eucharist, receiving the Sacrament of Confession and caring for others are all part of what it means to be tending our vineyard.

God our Father deeply desires to help us to be good tenants of our church, and of our souls. Knowing our weaknesses, He continually invites us to turn to Him. We have only to be open to Him to receive the precious gift of His never-failing love. God will not force His will onto us because God gave each of us a free will. Rather it is God's earnest desire that the members of His church listen and commit their lives to His Son, Jesus.

Today, let us take the time to look into the vineyard of our soul and into our Church to see how well they are being tended. With this in mind, let's come forward to receive our Lord Jesus in Holy Communion with humble and grateful hearts, so we may be drawn closer to our Lord and strengthened to go and be His tenants producing good fruit in the world.