

27th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME YEAR A 2020

Isaiah 5:1-7

Philippians 4:6-9

Matthew 21:33-43

Reflection

Fr Tao Pham

Dear sisters and brothers, this weekend's First Reading (Is 5:1-7) talks about the owner of a vineyard who did everything he possibly could for his vineyard, yet all it produced was sour grapes. The owner of the vineyard is God. The vineyard stands for the people of Israel. The care lavished on the vineyard by its owner represents God's care for his people. God expected justice from his people, but all he got was bloodshed. Because the vineyard failed to respond to God's gracious care, it will become what it had been without his favour, namely, a wilderness. The Gospel echoes the theme of the First Reading.

The parable in this weekend's Gospel is an allegory of God's dealings with his people. The landowner is God. The vineyard is Israel. The wicked tenants are the people of Israel, but more especially the religious leaders who had been given charge of the vineyard by God. They were given care of the vineyard but they didn't produce for the Lord. While the slaves sent by God who come to collect the earnings for the owner are the prophets. The tenants (Israel) punish and even kill the slaves (the prophets). The owner decides to send his son (Jesus). The tenants rejected the son who came to help them produce a yield for the Lord. The son and heir is Jesus himself whom they killed. Jesus like the son in the parable, is dragged outside Jerusalem before he is crucified. The tenants killed Jesus in the hope of taking over vineyard themselves.

The vineyard was then given to new keepers. Jesus tells them that the vineyard will be taken from the original tenants (the Jews), and let out to other tenants (the Gentiles). Now in Jesus Christ, the Gentiles are the new agents of God's purpose, blessing and grace in our world. That is us. Matthew is making clear that Jesus is the stone rejected by the builders (the Jewish leaders), who, through the power of God (manifested in the resurrection), has become the cornerstone of a new building (the new people of God that includes the Gentiles). Jesus again has his listeners pass judgement on the case when he asks them what the owner will do to the tenants and lease the vineyard to others (Gentiles), Jesus quotes from the Old Testament Psalm (118:22) that speaks of the rejected stone as the cornerstone of the structure. Jesus is the cornerstone that, when

rejected by Israel, leaves Israel to its own destruction. Jesus will become the cornerstone of the new structure of the Church.

The wicked tenants are the people of Israel, but more especially the religious leaders who had been given charge of the vineyard by God. What the tenants did was sinful and ugly. Most of the blame is with the religious leaders, who had been given charge of the vineyard by God. Yet God did not abandon or destroy the vineyard. Instead, he handed it over to other tenants, who would produce the fruits, Jesus, the stone rejected by the builders (the Jewish leaders), became the cornerstone of a new building (the new people of God that includes the Gentiles).

The parable shows us that there is only one way to overcome evil. Evil can be overcome only by good. What happens in the parable is evil. However, evil does not have the final say. No one can say that Jesus didn't live in the real world. He experienced its ugliness at first hand. But he didn't answer it with more ugliness. He triumphed over evil by good. He has become a model for all those who suffer unjustly in the cause of right. And he looks to us his followers, the tenants of the new vineyard (the Church), to produce the fruits of justice, love and peace. It's a great privilege by a great challenge too. Yet God didn't give up on them. He sent messenger after messenger to them (the prophets). But far from listening to them, they abused some of them and killed others. God was disappointed in them, not for his own sake, but for their sake. They squandered the blessings he wanted them to enjoy. Sadly, the vineyard was destined to become a wilderness.

This to some extent is our story too. God wants us to make use of the gifts and opportunities he has given us so that we can grow as his children. But often we fail to respond to his love. And yet God doesn't write us off, but gives us chance after chance. We fail not just as individuals but also as Church. The Christian community is the vineyard Christ planted and for which he gave his life. He looks to us, the tenants of his vineyard, to produce the fruits of justice, love, and peace. It's a great privilege but a great challenge too.

Dear sisters and brothers, God has given us a vineyard, the only one like it, as far as we know, in the universe blessed with the miracle of human life. The Lord has given us a beautiful country. Whether it is a place where all of human life has a chance to grow and thrive is up to us. Whether the future holds a respect for human life is not decided by the stars, it will be decided by ourselves. None of us can do everything. We all can do something to restore respect for human life in our time.

The images today in the first reading and the Gospel are about what we humans do with our lives, both personally and as a people or as a community. We mess things up and we reject God and His ways. The image used to show that God

sees what is happening is that of God's anger—but we must remember that it is God who is upset with us for choosing against Him. God always loves us unconditionally and even accepts our rejection of Him. God cannot change us unless we choose to let God change us. Sometimes when our lives are a mess, all we can do is ask God: "Help me." That is enough. But when we blame the mess on God and reject God, then God cannot help us unless we have some openness to Him. So the message of the readings today is very clear: choose God and pray to God with a complete confidence. If we reject God, he cannot go against our own free will which He gave us. God's choice is always love! Our choice is up to us. Amen.

Fr Tao Pham