

08 October 2017 (27th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A)

Isaiah 5:1-7; Psalm 79(80):9,12-16,19-20; Philippians 4:6-9; Matthew 21: 33-43.

The stone rejected by the builders that became the keystone.

Once again we have a parable about a vineyard. In the first reading from the prophet Isaiah we hear about another vineyard, and the prophet tells us that the vineyard is the People of God. The parable in the gospel follows the one in Isaiah very closely, obviously taking it up and developing it further.

In today's parable, it is very clear to see that the vineyard is the people of Israel, the landowner is God, the tenants are the Jewish leaders, the servants are the prophets and the son is Jesus himself. In a few lines this parable narrates the story of the Old Testament; God has been constantly sending messengers to his people expecting to reap the fruits from the vineyard, but instead these messengers were mistreated. Now God sent his only son who is also mistreated and even killed – outside the city! The vineyard will now be taken away from its present tenants, the Jewish leaders, and given to new tenants, the leaders of the new Christian community.

While this parable was initially used against the Jewish leaders who refused to accept Jesus, it is being presented to us also for our own instruction. For us today the vineyard is our Church community and our own life, and we are the tenants invited to work in this vineyard in order to produce fruit in due season. The image of working in the vineyard is again an important part of the parable; we are invited to be active and participate in the cultivation of the vineyard of the Lord. We cannot just sit on the fence and watch as everyone else does the work.

Moreover, God still sends us messengers, we do not call them prophets, but they do come in our midst and continue to challenge us to follow in God's word and to produce good fruit. The challenge for each of us is whether we are open and listen to God's word in our life. What is the fruit that I produce?

I am sure that like the people of the Old Testament, we too often refuse to listen to God's messengers and at times we might even be violent in our confrontation with them. We are all sinners and we are all in need of God's mercy. The good news is that God never gives up on us but rather continues sending us more messengers; the invitation is always open for us to listen to the word and respond in love.

The gospel reading introduces another shorter parable: the stone that was rejected by the builders, because of its odd shape, ended up being the keystone, holding the arch together. The Jewish leaders rejected Jesus by crucifying him, but instead of getting rid of him, he actually became the Christ and Lord in his resurrection.

Even in our own life, although we often reject God and his word through our sins, God never abandons us, he is the keystone (or cornerstone) of our life; he is always there to support us in our daily journey. The invitation is for us to be dutiful tenants, doing our work in the vineyard and producing the fruit expected of us.

Fr Mario