

## **Twenty-Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time A2023**

I presume that, without a risk of making a mistake, the majority of you are made up of farmers. You usually plant seeds in your fields, you watch them grow, blossom and bear fruit. I wonder if you could identify yourselves with the owner of the vineyard in both parables from the first reading of Isaiah and from the Gospel of Matthew. I also guess that you would be very disappointed if after having worked so hard in your field and used all your best techniques, your seeds do not give the fruits you were expecting. That is the situation we have in today's readings. That situation is about the relationship between God and his people of Israel.

To better understand the stakes of that relationship, let us recall briefly the history of God and Israel. Israel has received a lot of blessings from God. They were chosen among all the nations of the earth to be God's own people, not because they were extraordinary, but simply because of God's love, which is a gratuitous act.

God chose Abraham out of love and made him the father of the believers. Even if Abraham believed and this was credited to him as righteousness (Rm. 4: 2), however, what came first was not his answer, but rather God's initiative. It was gratuitously and out of love that God blessed Isaac and Jacob and made their offspring a great nation.

During the time of famine, God protected them and let them go to Egypt to escape death and bitterness. When in Egypt the situation became dangerous for their safety under the reign of Pharaoh, God liberated them from slavery. When in the desert they were hungry and thirsty, God gave them manna and water. As though all that was not enough, God made a covenant with them and sent them many prophets to spiritually nourish them and to remind them of his law. Such is the history of God with Israel, a history made of bounty and grace on the side of God.

Against those acts of God's bounty, Israel had always reacted unfaithfully. Time and again they forgot the covenant and worshiped foreign gods. Time and again, they allowed injustice to happen in their midst by oppressing the weak and the poor, the widow and the orphan. When the prophets were sent to them to call them to conversion, they persecuted them and killed some.

It is that history of betrayal and unfaithfulness that is portrayed in a symbolic language through the image of the vineyard. Israel, Isaiah says and the Gospel too, is the vineyard that the Lord cared so much for and for which he gave everything, but it yielded only sour grapes.

What God expected from his people was to keep the Covenant, to practice social justice, to love and protect the poor, the orphan and the widow. Instead of all that, it was sin, infidelity, oppression, hatred, bloodshed, false accusations and external cult without conversion of heart in what they were involved.

This history of Israel is the story of each of us; it is the story of our relationship with God. God has been generous and loving with us, by bestowing upon us his finest gifts. These are to be protected, nourished and cared for, so that we can return the abundant harvest to him. We are his vineyard! We can rejoice in our gifts, but we must also remember that the gifts are bestowed on loan and God expects good fruit from his

vineyard. We are stewards of God's gifts. This is a big responsibility. We owe a lot to God in return for every blessing received from him.

The prophet Isaiah describes God's disappointment in these terms: "He looked for the crop of the grapes, but what it yielded was wild grapes". Wild grapes multiply when the vineyard is not properly tended. God is disappointed with us when we sit back and allow weeds to grow within our lives. God expects us to recognize the dignity of our gifts, the beauty of our lives, the joy of our families and neighborhoods and to act as responsible stewards.

While Isaiah says that the vineyard will be destroyed, Jesus states that only the tenants will be replaced and the vineyard will be kept. If we read the Gospel at this point we see the love of God for us. God does not destroy us because of our infidelity and refusal to do his will. He is patient with us; what he seeks is our conversion. The handing of the vineyard to other workers instead of its destruction translates this intention of God.

Then, we understand that the rejection of our Lord Jesus was turned into a blessing for us. God transforms even a failure into success and he knows how to draw wonderful things from the sin of man. "The stone that builders rejected has become the cornerstone" and this is the marvels the Lord has done for us.

We have to see in the servants that the landowner sent to obtain his produce those many chances God gives us to turn him and serve him actively and obediently. And yet, we have ignored those most special times of grace given us. How many decisive moments we have squandered: those occasions of turning to God, those insights of new beginnings in our lives, those gracious opportunities of reconciliation with God or our neighbors, the voice of God through the voice of a friend or a family-member, in a sermon, in silence, in reading of the scripture.

These are the moments that God uses to talk to us. These are occasions when God is knocking at our doors, waiting for our answer. Today as it was in the past, it is the same appeal of God that comes to us. Will we listen to it or not? Will we accept it or not? We will hear God speaking to us in the Catechism, in the Homily or through a spiritual talk?

St Paul gives us some tips that can help us rebuild our relationship with God: Whatever is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, gracious, worthy, this is what we have to do in rebuilding our relationship with God. Let us ask God to help us be his true vineyard and to bear abundant fruits.

### **Isaiah 5: 1-7; Philippians 4: 6-9; Matthew 21: 33-43**



Homily Date: October 08, 2023  
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Document Name: 20231008homily