

TRINITY 17-2020

Isaiah 5:1-7

Phil 4:6-9

Mt21:33-44

Two of today's readings are parables, stories that contain a deep inner meaning. The setting of both is a vineyard and in Isaiah's story, everything that could be done to produce a good harvest was done, yet no harvest was forthcoming. The Jews who heard this story realised that they were the vineyard and that God had cared for them, protected them and provided their needs. Yet they had not been faithful to his laws and his will. Isaiah warned them that they would suffer as a result of their actions.

In our day, the disparity between what the secular law decrees and what God's moral law requires is turning into active persecution against the Catholic Church. This clash is most visible in the differing attitudes to the sanctity of life. Secular legality is concerned with the governance of society. Christian morality is concerned with salvation. As Portia in the Merchant of Venice says, "Though justice be thy plea, consider this. That in the course of justice, none of us should see salvation" (Act 4 scene 1).

God longs for our salvation not our destruction, and the hearers of Jesus' parable would quickly make the connection with Isaiah's. God is the owner of the vineyard, the tenants are his people Israel, the prophets are the servants and while the initial hearers may not have identified Jesus as the son and heir but Matthew makes that very clear. The Children of Israel and their leaders were living in their self-centred world as lords, not servants.

In Jesus' parable unlike Isaiah's, the vineyard is not destroyed because of the faithlessness of the tenants, but the tenancy is transferred to those from all nations and walks of life who will produce the fruits of the kingdom. The tenants may have killed the son and heir, but the inheritance still belongs to him and Matthew describes Jesus as the stone rejected by the builders who becomes the cornerstone of a new community, namely the Church. The new tenants of God's vineyard are those who recognise who Jesus is and who respond to God's love. These tenants don't have a sense of entitlement about God's grace and don't think that salvation comes as a free gift with a baptism certificate.

So what does God expect of us? Blood sweat and tears may be demanded of some, but he does demand an attitude that no matter how grim things may appear we must not fall into despair. God does not abandon us even if we abandon him at times, and it is St Paul who tells his readers to stop worrying, keep working and pray in every situation encountering God in each of them. The psalmists often sink into the depths of human emotion and reach the point of giving up when they recall what God has done for them and his people in the past. They turn the corner and end their psalm in joy and thanksgiving.

St Paul goes further and encourages his readers to make specific requests to God in prayer rather than praying for or about general matters. This does *not* mean giving God instructions on how to fix things, but it does mean taking specific concerns to the foot of the Cross and leaving them there in the hands of Our Lord. This prayer says Paul, brings that deep peace

which only God can give. This kind of prayer brings unity within ourselves and a knowledge that we are his and the sheep of his pasture.

As the Book of Proverbs reminds us, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all that you do and he will show you which path to take” (Proverbs 3:5-6).

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