

Twenty-Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)
(Isaiah 5:1-7 / Matthew 21:33-43)
05.10.2014

Dear brothers and sisters,

The theme of the vineyard runs through the two readings that we have just heard this morning. In the reading from the prophet Isaiah, the vineyard is “the House of Israel”. In the gospel passage, the vineyard is the new Israel of God, that is to say the Church, made up of believers drawn from both Judaism and the Nations.

What is emphasized in both readings is **God’s love for his vineyard**, God’s love for Israel, God’s love for the Church, and consequently God’s love for each one of us as members of the New Israel, the Church. Let us listen to Isaiah again: “Let me sing to my friend the song of his love for his vineyard. My friend had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. He dug the soil, cleared it of stones, and planted choice vines in it. In the middle he built a tower, he dug a press there too”. The message is as clear as crystal. God loves us! We know it, we believe it, but let us confess that it is sometimes difficult for us to believe it. Does it not happen that we doubt God’s love for us, we question God’s interest in us, especially when the path is tough, when trials submerge us? In these circumstances, how good and useful it is to come back to these verses and read them again and again attentively. There is a power in them, a kind of healing balm. How good it is to give thanks regularly in prayer to the Lord for his love for us, and to bear witness to his love all around us, not only by our words but above all by our lives of charity. If we do so, when trials come, our faith will be stronger.

The truth is that when anything or even, as sometimes happens, everything goes wrong, God is always there to help us to go through and beyond our difficulties. God created us out of love and He accompanies us day after day out of love, and, in the end, He will welcome us beyond death in his kingdom. God’s love for us is not the love of a sugar daddy who would clear the path before us of all difficulties. God’s love for us is not a comprehensive insurance policy which would protect us from every possible trial. God’s love helps us to grow and mature in all our trials by helping us to get through and beyond them. God’s love for us is the love of someone who respects our freedom. God proposes his love to us but He does not impose it. God is always within us, beside us and among us ever ready to help us grow and move forward if only we open to Him the door of our heart. God’s love for us is renewed every morning.

Let us come back to our two readings. In the text of Isaiah, the Lord’s contention is with the vineyard, with Israel, God’s people. “The Lord expected grapes and he got sour grapes. He expected justice but found bloodshed, integrity and found only a cry of distress”. In the gospel passage, the contention of Jesus is not with the vineyard, the people, but with the tenants, with Israel’s leaders. This parable is addressed to the chief priests and elders of the people. This parable describes the failure of the tenants.

What is **the failure of the tenants**? This question is important for us today because each one of us is a tenant, cultivating a small portion of God’s vineyard. The failure of the

tenants is that they behave as if they were the landowner. They appropriate something which is not theirs. They take for themselves what is not theirs instead of giving to others their legitimate due. This is a temptation not only for the tenants but for each one of us. So often we act as if we were God instead of acknowledging that we are only his creatures, his servants. In our lives, it is often all about 'us' when it should be all about 'God and us'. How difficult it is to live a life of covenant with the Lord, anxious to do his will and not our own! How difficult it is for us not to take the place of God, but instead simply to be ourselves and remain at our place, living well whatever it is we have to live, doing well whatever it is we are called to do. How difficult for us it is to consent to be who we are; we prefer to dream of being someone else! If only each one of us was at our place, happy to be there, life would be much easier for all of us.

The behaviour of the tenants with the landowner's son draws our attention to the mysterious person of the son. "Finally, he sent his son to them. 'They will respect my son' he said. But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other: 'this is the heir. Come on, let us kill him and take over his inheritance.' So they seized him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him". **The son of the parable is Jesus.** The son's death is a prophecy of Jesus' crucifixion outside Jerusalem. The quotation of psalm 117: "It was the stone rejected by the builders that became the keystone" underlines Jesus' triumph in his resurrection, not merely in spite of but precisely because of his rejection by contemporary Jewish leaders. Paradoxically, it was not only by being chosen by God but rejected by people that Jesus became the saviour of both the Nations and of Israel. This is true for us also. We cannot be faithful to our baptismal vocation without meeting with opposition, without being rejected in one way or another. This is a necessary passage if we want to bear fruit, or more exactly if we want to allow the Lord to bear fruit through us. This is a crucifying paradox to live but it is the path to life! We experience the resurrection through the Cross! There can be no resurrection without passing through the cross.

Once again, what is true for Jesus is true for each one of us who are called to be his followers, his disciples. Let us allow Christ's light to illuminate our own existences. The cross is never far away from us. The point for us is to look at the Cross courageously until it becomes a glorious cross, a luminous cross, a source of life, a symbol of victory over sin and death.