



SUNDAY GOSPEL

*Parable of the wicked
tenants*

MATTHEW 21:33-43

Jesus said to the chief priests and the elders of the people: 'Listen to another parable. There was a man, a landowner, who planted a vineyard; he fenced it round, dug a winepress in it and built a tower; then he leased it to tenants and went abroad. When vintage time drew near he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his produce. But the tenants seized his servants, thrashed one, killed another and stoned a third. Next he sent some more servants, this time a larger number, and they dealt with them in the same way. Finally he sent his son to them. "They will respect my



The parable of the wicked workers of the vineyard by Andrey Mironov

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. Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?' They answered, 'He will bring those wretches to a wretched end and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will

deliver the produce to him when the season arrives.' Jesus said to them, 'Have you never read in the scriptures:

It was the stone rejected by the builders that became the keystone. This was the Lord's doing and it is wonderful to see? 'I tell you, then, that the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit.' ■

A WORD FROM
POPE FRANCIS

The gospel places us before a drama, not of the people — for the people understood that Jesus was a great prophet — but of

the leaders of the people, and some of the priests of that time, of the doctors of the law, and of the elders whose hearts were not open to God's word. In fact, they heard Jesus, but rather than seeing in him God's Promised One, or rather than considering him to be a great prophet, they were afraid of him.

Essentially, they thought: "This man is a revolutionary, let us stop him in time, we must stop him!". Therefore, they sought to capture him, and they sought to put him to the test so that he would fall and be captured: it was a persecution against Jesus. But why this persecution? Because these people were not open to God's word; they were enclosed within their egoism.

It is within this context that Jesus tells the parable. God gave as an inheritance a land with a vineyard which he had planted and tilled with his own hands. In fact, we read in the gospel that the householder planted a vineyard, and set a hedge around it, and dug a wine press in it, and built a tower. They are all things which he did himself, with great love. And then he let the vineyard out to tenants.

This is exactly what the Lord has done with us. He has lent us life, and with it the promise that he would come to save us. Yet this people saw a profitable business venture in it: the vineyard is beautiful, let's take it, it's ours!. Thus, as the gospel tells us, the season of fruit drew near, and the householder's servants went to get his fruit. But the tenants, who had already placed themselves as masters of the vineyard, said: no, let us cast them out, this is ours!

This parable recounts the drama of this people and of us all. They made themselves masters of God's word; and the word of God became their word, a word fashioned according to their

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own interests, their own theologies, their own ideologies...everyone interpreted it according to his own will, according to his own interests; and they murdered to maintain this. In fact, this is precisely what happened to Jesus. The chief priests and the Pharisees understood that he was speaking about them when they heard this parable, and thus they sought to capture him and have him killed.

Yet in this way the Word of God becomes dead, it becomes trapped and the Holy Spirit becomes locked up in the desires of each of them. The same thing happens to us when we are not open to the newness of God's word, when we are not obedient to God's word. Disobeying the word of God is like trying to say: this is no longer God's Word: now it is ours.

As the word of God died in the heart of these people, it can also die in our hearts. And yet the word does not end there, for it is alive in the heart of the simple, the humble, the people of God.

In fact, those who were seeking to capture Jesus were afraid of the people because they considered him to be a prophet. The simple crowd followed Jesus because what Jesus said did them great good and warmed their hearts. They didn't use the Word of God for their own interests. Rather, they listened and sought to be better.

What can we do so as not to kill the Word of God, so as not to make ourselves masters of this word, to be docile, and not to lock up the Holy Spirit? Two simple ways: humility and prayer.

The people who would not accept God's word but rather said 'this is God's word, but I interpret it according to my own interests!' were certainly not humble. They were proud, self important, they were the supposed 'doctors'. They were people who "believed they had the power to change the meaning of God's word.

However, he said, there were also good and humble priests, humble Pharisees who received the Word of God in the right spirit; for example, the gospels

speak about Nicodemus. Therefore, the main disposition one needs in order to listen to God's word is humility, since without humility one cannot welcome and receive God's word.

The second disposition needed is prayer. The people of whom the parable speaks did not pray, they didn't need to pray: they felt quite secure and strong, they felt that they were gods.

Therefore with humility and prayer let us go forward in listening to God's word. Thus, what happened to these people will not happen to us: we will not kill in order to defend a word which we believe to be God's word but which in reality is actually a word we have utterly altered.

Let us ask that the Lord grant us the grace of humility to look upon Jesus as the Saviour who speaks to us: he speaks to me! Each one of us ought to say: he speaks to me! When we read the Gospels: he is speaking to me! Let us open our hearts to the Holy Spirit, who gives power to these words and to pray, to pray much that we might all be docile to receive this word and to obeying it.' ■

TALKING POINTS

1. Both last week and this week our receptivity of the Word is highlighted in the parable of the sower and parable of the tenants. How do you react when confronted by the Word? What takes place in you when the Word is received and welcomed.
2. Pope Francis offers two ways to counteract the Word dying within us: humility and prayer. What is your understanding of these two pillars?

PRAYER POINTS

Pray for Each Other: Ask about and pray for the needs of the group members. Individuals might pray for themselves or ask someone else to pray for them.

Response: *Holy Spirit come.*

Reflect: It is the Holy Spirit that reveals to us both Jesus and His Word of Truth. It is also the Holy Spirit who brings 'newness' in welcoming these, for what the Holy Spirit touches, the Holy Spirit changes! Are you willing to pray for more of the Holy Spirit in your life?

Closing Prayer: Holy Spirit you are welcome here. My we not be deceived by pride or fear. May your light, by which we can know Jesus and be touched by the Word, dwell with us now.