

GOSPEL

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 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 REFLECTION
BY POPE FRANCIS**

This Sunday's liturgy offers us the parable of the tenants to whom a landowner lends the vineyard which he has planted, and then goes away. This is how the loyalty of these tenants is tested: the vineyard is entrusted to them, they are to tend it, make it bear fruit and deliver its harvest to the owner. When the time comes to harvest the grapes, the landlord sends his servants to pick the fruit. However, the vineyard tenants assume a possessive attitude. They do not consider themselves to be simple supervisors, but rather landowners, and they refuse to hand over the harvest. They mistreat the servants, to the point of killing them. The landowner is patient with them. He sends more servants, larger in number than the previous ones, but the result is the same. In the end, he patiently decides to send his own son. But those tenants, prisoners to their own possessive behaviour, also kill the

son, reasoning that, in this way, they would have the inheritance.

This narrative allegorically illustrates the reproaches of the prophets in the story of Israel. It is a history that belongs to us. It is about the Covenant which God wished to establish with mankind and in which he also called us to participate. Like any other love story, this story of the Covenant has its positive moments too, but it is also marked by betrayal and rejection. In order to make us understand how God the Father responds to the rejection of his love and his proposal of an alliance, the Gospel passage puts a question on the lips of the owner of the vineyard: "When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?". This question emphasizes that God's disappointment at the wicked behaviour of mankind is not the last word! This is the great novelty of Christianity: a God who, even though disappointed by our mistakes and our sins, does not fail to keep his Word, does not give up and, most of all, does not seek vengeance!

My brothers and sisters, God does not avenge himself. God loves, he does not avenge himself. He waits for us, to forgive us, to embrace us. Through the "rejected stones" — and Christ is the first stone that the builders rejected — through situations of weakness and sin, God continues to circulate "the new wine" of his vineyard, namely mercy. This is the new wine of the Lord's vineyard: mercy. There is only one obstacle to the tenacious and tender will of God: our arrogance and our conceit which, at times also becomes violence! Faced with these attitudes where no fruit is produced, the Word of God retains all its power to reprimand and reproach: "Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation producing the fruits of it".

The urgency of replying with good fruits to the call of the Lord, who asks us to become his vineyard, helps us understand what is new and original about the Christian faith. It is not so much the sum of precepts and moral norms but rather, it is first and foremost a proposal of love which God makes through Jesus and continues to make with mankind. It is an invitation to enter into this love story, by becoming a lively and open vine, rich in fruits and hope for everyone. A closed vineyard can

become wild and produce wild grapes. We are called to leave this vineyard to put ourselves at the service of our brothers and sisters who are not with us, in order to shake each other and encourage each other, to remind ourselves that we must be the Lord's vineyard in every environment, even the more distant and challenging ones.

Dear brothers and sisters, let us invoke the intercession of the Most Holy Mary, so that she may help us to be everywhere, in particular in the peripheries of society, the vineyard that the Lord planted for the good of all and to bring the new wine of the Lord's mercy.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What does your being a 'tenant' or a 'steward' of God's world mean — how would it differ if you were the owner?
- What does fruitfulness mean for you in the life of faith? How do you know you're producing the fruit, personally and in your ministry, that Jesus speaks about in today's parable?
- God the Father continues to send prophets to us calling us back to placing God and his kingdom at the centre of our lives? Who are these prophets in today's world, how do you respond to their message?

PRAYER

*Spend some time in prayer
with one another*

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. "Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray")
3. Move to prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others' prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps reciting the 'Glory Be' or similar prayer.