

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.'

REFLECTION BY POPE FRANCIS*8 October 2023*

Today, the Gospel presents us with a dramatic parable that has a sad ending (cf. Mt 21:33-43). A landowner planted a vineyard and took good care of it. Then, needing to go away, he entrusted it to some tenants. When harvest time drew near, he sent his servants to collect his crop. But the tenants maltreated and killed them. So, the owner sent his son, and those tenants killed him too. How come? What went wrong? There is a message from Jesus in this parable.

The landowner did everything well, with love. He himself toiled to plant the vineyard. He surrounded it with a hedge to protect it, dug a wine press in it,

and built a watchtower (cf. v. 33). Then he entrusted his vineyard to some tenants, leasing his prized possession to them, thus treating them on an equal plane, so that his vineyard would be well cultivated and bear fruit. Given these circumstances, the harvest should have come to a happy end, in a festive atmosphere, with a fair division of the produce to everyone's satisfaction.

Instead, ungrateful and greedy thoughts insinuated themselves into the minds of the tenants. Indeed, there is always some ungratefulness at the root of conflicts, as well as greedy sentiments — wanting to quickly take possession of things. "We do not have to give anything to the owner. The fruit of our labour belongs to us alone! We do not have to be accountable to anyone". This is the reasoning of these labourers. And this is not true: they should have been grateful for what they had received and for how they had been treated. Instead, ingratitude gave rise to greed, and a progressive sense of rebellion grew within them, which led them to see the situation in a distorted way, to feel that the owner was in their debt rather than that they were in debt to the owner who had given them work. When they saw the son, they went as far as saying: "This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and have his inheritance!" (v. 38). And they go from being tenants to murderers. It is a whole process. And many times, this process takes place in the hearts of people, even in our hearts.

With this parable, Jesus reminds us what happens when people deceive themselves into thinking that they are self-made, and they forget to be grateful, they forget the real basis of life: that good comes from the grace of God, that good comes from his free gift. When one forgets this gratitude to God, one ends up facing one's situation and limitations no longer with the joy of feeling loved and saved, but rather with the sad illusion of needing neither love nor salvation. These people stop letting themselves be loved and find that they are prisoners of their own greed, prisoners of the need to have more than others, of wanting to stand out over others. This process is ugly, and it often happens to us. Let us think about this seriously. Many dissatisfactions and recriminations, many misunderstandings and many feelings of envy arise from this. And, driven by resentment, one can fall headlong into a spiral of violence. Yes,

dear brothers and sisters, ungratefulness generates violence, it takes peace away, and makes us feel and yell when we speak, without peace, while a simple “thank you” can restore peace!

So, let us ask ourselves: Am I aware that I have received the gifts of life and of faith? Am I aware that I myself am a gift? Do I believe that everything comes from the grace of the Lord? Do I understand that, without merit, I am the beneficiary of these things, that I am loved and saved gratuitously? And above all, in response to grace, do I know how to say “thank you”? Do I know how to say “thanks”? Three words that are the secret to human coexistence are thank you, excuse me, sorry. Do I know how to say these three things? Thanks, excuse me, I’m sorry. Do I know how to say these three phrases? “Thanks” is a small word, “excuse me” is a small expression, saying I am sorry, “forgive me”, is a small expression. It is what God and our brothers and sisters await every day. Let us ask ourselves if these small words, “thanks”, “excuse me”, “forgive me, sorry”, are present in our lives. Do I know how to thank, to say “thank you”? Do I know how to say sorry, “forgive me”? Do I know how not to be intrusive — “excuse me”? Thank you, I’m sorry, excuse me.

May Mary, whose soul magnifies the Lord, help us make gratitude the light that dawns daily in our hearts.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What stood out to you from the Gospel or Reflection/ Homily?



Head: Pope Francis suggests that ingratitude is often at the root of greed, resentment, and conflict. How does this parable challenge the idea that what we have is simply the result of our own efforts?



Heart: Pope Francis warns that we can forget that everything is ultimately a gift. Where in your life are you most tempted to take God's gifts, or other people's generosity, for granted?



Hands: Pope Francis highlights three simple phrases: “thank you”, “excuse me”, and “I’m sorry”. Which of these do you most need to practise this week, and with whom?

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. Offer 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 praying the ‘Glory Be’.