

The Parable of the Wicked Tenants (27th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A)

Isaiah 5:1-7—The Parable of the Lord’s Vineyard

1. A “Love Song” concerning “My Vineyard” (5:1)
2. The Beloved/Vineyard Owner = the Lord
3. The Vineyard = city of Jerusalem (“house of Israel/men of Judah”; cf. 5:14 ‘nobility’)
4. Grapes = good fruits (“justice”)
5. Wild Grapes = wicked fruits (“bloodshed” and “a cry” of the oppressed)
6. Result: The Vineyard shall be destroyed (5:3)

Psalm 80—The Vineyard of the Lord

1. Psalm contains an “allegory” as well
2. Vine = twelve tribes (taken “out of Egypt”) (vv.8-11)
3. Vineyard = Jerusalem (“walls” are “broken down”) (vv. 12-13)
4. Prayer for Deliverance: mysterious reference to the “Son of man” (vv. 14-19)

Philippians 4:6-9—Have No Anxiety at All

1. Have no “anxiety”: instead “prayer and supplication with thanksgiving” (4:6)

Matthew 21:33-43—The Parable of the Wicked Tenants

1. The Context of the Parable: speaking to the “chief priests and elders” (Matt 21:23)
2. The Householder = the Lord
3. The Vineyard = Jerusalem (cf. Isa 5:1-7)
4. The Tenants = leaders in Jerusalem
5. The Servants = the prophets of the Lord (cf. Matt 23:37)
 - a. Beaten
 - b. Killed: Isaiah is “sawn in two” (cf. Heb 11:37; *Lives of the Prophets* 1:1)
 - c. Stoned: Jeremiah stoned to death (cf. *Lives of the Prophets* 2:1)
6. The Son = Jesus
 - a. Twist: “They will respect my son” (!)
 - b. “Let us kill him...”; Jesus killed outside the city (cf. John 19:17, 20)
7. Results: “Tenants” are put to death; vineyard let out to “other tenants”
8. Jesus’ Explanation:
 - a. Jewish Scripture: “Stone” rejected by “builders” (cf. Psalm 118:22-23)
 - b. Kingdom of God: “taken away from you” (=leaders of the Old Covenant)
 - c. And given to “another nation” (= leaders of the New Covenant; cf. Matt 19:28)
 - d. Jewish Scripture: “stone” that falls and “crushes” (cf. Dan 2:44-45)

Vatican II: the Church as the Vineyard of the Lord

The Church is a piece of land to be cultivated, the tillage of God... That land, like a choice vineyard, has been planted by the heavenly Husbandman. The true vine is Christ

who gives life and the power to bear abundant fruit to the branches, that is, to us, who through the Church remain in Christ without whom we can do nothing. (Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium* 6).

Questions for Discussion and Reflection (27th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A)

1. The image of God’s people as a “vineyard” is used in the Old Testament reading, the responsorial Psalm, and the parable of Jesus. What are the major implications of this metaphor?

2. Where is the ‘twist’ in the Parable of the Wicked Tenants? What does it reveal about *who* Jesus thinks he is, in comparison with the ‘servants’ sent before him?

3. People often think of the Church as *our* institution—as something that belongs to *us*. What are the implications of realizing that the Church is *God’s* vineyard and we are “workers” in the “vineyard of the Lord”?

For Further Study

1. Curtis Mitch and Edward Sri. *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 276-79. A brief but excellent discussion of the “Parable of the Wicked Tenants” by a fantastic Catholic commentary on Matthew’s Gospel.
2. Klyne R. Snodgrass. *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 276-298. An excellent, in-depth discussion by a Protestant scholar of everything you ever wanted to know about the Parable of the Wicked Tenants.