

XXVIIth SUNDAY/A

Brothers and Sisters,

Among all the peoples on earth, the people of Israel has received from God a lot gifts and benefits. God has chosen them to be his own people, not because they were very extraordinary people, but because of his love which is a gratuitous act. They did not do anything special to attract the heart of God so that he might love them. The love of God for them and their choice are pure acts of gratuitousness of God which is based on his bounty and grace.

It was gratuitously and out of love that Abraham has been chosen by God and made the forefather of the believers. Even if Abraham believed and this was credited to him as righteousness (Rm. 4,2), however, what comes first is not the answer, but rather the initiative of God. It was gratuitously and out of love that God blessed Isaac and Jacob and made their offspring a great nation.

During the time of famine, God protect them by letting them go to Egypt to escape death and bitterness. When in Egypt the situation became dangerous for their safety under the reign of Pharaoh, God stretched out the strength of his arm by liberating them from slavery. In the desert when they were hungry, God fed them with a food coming from heaven; when thirsty he gave them a spring water: he protected them as a mother does for her beloved ones. He made a covenant with them and sent them many prophets to nourish them spiritually and to remind them his law. Such is the history of God with Israel, a history made of bounty and grace in the side of God.

To this bounty and grace of God, Israel has always reacted unfaithfully. Time and time again they have forgotten the covenant and adored foreign gods. Time and time again, they have allowed injustice to happen in their midst by oppressing the weak and the poor, the widow and the orphan. When the prophets were sent to them to call them to conversion, they persecuted them and killed some.

It is this Israelite history done of the ups and the downs that today's readings try to portray in a symbolic language through the image of the vineyard. Israel, says Isaiah and the Gospel too, is the vineyard that the Lord cared for so much and for which he manifested a great love, but it yielded only sour grapes. As a matter of fact, what God has demanded from his people was just to keep the alliance, to practice social justice, to love and protect the poor, the orphan and the widow. Instead of all this, it was sin, infidelity, oppression, hatred, bloodshed, false accusations and external cult without conversion of heart.

This history of Israel is the history of each of us; it is the history of our relationship with God. God has been generous and loving in confiding the finest gifts to us. These are to be protected, nourished and cared for, so that we can return the abundant harvest to God. We are the vineyard! We can rejoice in our gifts, but we must also remember that the gifts are bestowed on loan and God expects good fruit from his vineyard. This responsibility is

very serious.

The prophet Isaiah portrays God thoroughly disappointed: “*he looked for the crop of the grapes, but what it yielded was wild grapes*”. Wild grapes multiply when the vineyard is not properly tended. God is disappointed in us when we lazily sit back and allow weeds to grow within our lives. In other words, God expects us to recognize the dignity of our gifts, the beauty of our lives, the joy of our families and neighborhoods. The lazy indifferent person is condemned.

While Isaiah says that the vineyard will be destroyed, Jesus states that only the tenants will be replaced and the vineyard will be kept. If we read the Gospel at this point we see the love of God for us. In fact, God does not destroy us because of our infidelity and refusal to do his will. He is patient with us; what he seeks first of all is our conversion. The handing of the vineyard to other workers instead of its destruction translates this intention of God. It is not an act of vindictive reprisal by the owner, it is a deed of love and salvation from which all will draw benefits.

In this way we can say that the rejection of Jesus was turned into a blessing for all... because God transforms even a failure into success and knows also how to draw wonderful things from the sin of man. “*The stone that builders rejected has become the cornerstone*” and this is the marvels the Lord has done for us.

This is the reason why we have to see in the servants that the owner sent to obtain his produce these many chances to turn and serve the Lord actively and obediently that God gives us. And yet, we have ignored those most special times of grace. We all recognize those decisive moments, those turns of conscience, those insights of new beginnings in our lives, those gracious opportunities of reconciliation with God or with our neighbors, the voice of God through the voice of a friend or a family-member, in a sermon, in silence, in reading of the scripture. These are the moments that God uses to talk to us.

All these are the occasions when God is knocking at our doors, waiting our answer. How did we reacted ? Did we listen to him? Did we even try to change the style of our life? Perhaps, no. Once more, today it is the same appeal of God that comes to us? How do we react to it? My sisters and brothers, if we want to reconstruct our relationship with God St. Paul gives us the way we have to follow. Whatever is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, gracious, worthy, this is what on which we have to base our life. Let us ask God to help us to be his true vineyard and to bear abundant fruits.



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