

Twenty-Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time A/2014

The readings of this Sunday talk about God's love and human response. They show that because of his love for us, God takes care of us. They invite us to love him in turn by being obedient to his commands.

The first reading of the book of Isaiah talks about a vineyard that a man had in the countryside. It relates how the owner brought to it all the possible care he could so that it produces a good crop of grapes. It shows that, unfortunately, it did not give the expected harvest, but it brought forth wild grapes. It shows also that, because of this wild productivity, the owner decided to abandon it for good and to condemn it to destruction. The text finishes in referring to the people of Israel as that vineyard for which God cared so much, but which brought not a response of judgment, but bloodshed, not justice but outcry.

What is behind this text is the idea that God's love for us is without measure. There is also the idea that God provides us with all the graces we need in order to grow spiritually and to give the full measure of what he wants us to be. Another idea is that in spite of God's love for us, people want to lead their lives without him and without his guidance. The last idea is the truth that whatever might be the length of human life and the wastefulness of God's grace, one day the judgment will come so that we account for the way we have lived.

This text allows us to understand what is at stake in today's Gospel as Jesus speaks of the parable of the landowner and his vineyard. In fact, the Gospel starts by describing all the care the landowner provided for his vineyard, from modernization to protection. Then, it described how he leased to the tenants and went on a journey.

After that, it describes how, when the time of vintage came, the landowner dispatched his workers in order to collect the fruits of the vine. It accounts particularly of the behavior of the tenants who killed all the servants, even the son of the owner sent to them in order to obtain the production from the vineyard.

Then, the Gospel relates about what the landowner will do to the wicked tenants, how he will put them to death and lease the vineyard to other people who could give him produce in due time.

The Gospel finishes with two declarations of Jesus. The first refers to psalm 118: 22 that says that the stone rejected by the builders has become a cornerstone. The second is a warning that affirms that the kingdom will be taken away from you and given to those who can produce fruits. What do we learn from this Gospel? Today I want to talk about God's care and human rejection. Let me start with a simple human experience in which each one of us can recognize himself. In fact, parents who have children know that they sacrifice a lot for them in terms of time, talent and money, in order to give them the best they can offer so that they may succeed in their own life.

However, the experience has shown also and, parents know it very well, that in spite of their good will and all the sacrifice accepted for them, they do not always live up to their expectation. When it happens this way, they are all full of frustration and disappointment. But, disappointment does not mean that they stop loving them. On the contrary, they

keep hoping that they can do better in the future and if there is an opportunity for them to do better, they will certainly help.

This is exactly the situation of the relationship between Israel and God, as we heard in the first reading. When the Gospel says that the landowner dispatched many servants, including his own son, in order to obtain the fruits of the vine, it refers to the whole picture of the history of salvation where prophets and God's messengers, including Jesus Christ, were sent to Israel in order to bring them back to God, but without success.

What strikes in this parable is, first of all, the care the landowner provides for his vineyard in putting a hedge, digging a wine press and building a tower so that it might be protected and secured. What is striking, also, is the trust the landowner puts in the tenants to whom he leases the vineyard and his patience in dealing with their wickedness as they kill his servants.

All this refers to God dealing with us as he entrusts his gifts and his work to us. In that sense, any task we exercise in this world is given us by God and for which he expects us to produce good fruits. However, when we fail to respond correctly to God's expectation, he does not reject us; on the contrary, he gives us a new chance so that we do better.

That is why the history of Israel is the history of each one of us with its ups and downs. It is also the history of God's love for us, with all the blessings and graces he has bestowed on us. We should not, however, forget that where there is grace and blessing, there is a question of responsibility and accountability. In that sense, we are answerable to God. In other words, to receive God's blessing is a privilege, but with every privilege comes accountability.

Moreover, what we receive in this world does not make us our own owners. Rather, we are stewards who manage the things of the earth on behalf of God. Should a steward behave like an owner, he would be making a mistake, because one day he has to give a report of his management.

I believe that this is the reason why the Gospel ends up with a warning that states that the kingdom will be taken away from us. If that happens, therefore, it means that we would have not performed our job correctly, which means in other words that we were useless. To become useless to God is to sink to the lowest level of life.

That is why it is imperative that we listen to Jesus who is the foundation of our life and do his will. Let us not think that we still have time. Let us take the opportunity God gives us today and make peace with God by changing our life. May God bless you all!

Isaiah 5: 1-7; Philippians 4: 6-9; Matthew 21: 33-43



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