

27th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME; Cycle – A; Oct. 8th 2023
Isaiah 5:1-7; Philippians 4:6-9; Matthew 21:33-43

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

This is the third consecutive week we hear Jesus use the imagery of the vineyard in his teachings. It shows how important and popular this imagery was among the people of Israel. And also during the time of Jesus vine cultivation was very common in Palestine. Actually Jesus borrowed this imagery from the Old Testament. Over and over again in the Old Testament, Israel is pictured as the vine or the vineyard of God. In today's first reading *Isaiah* says, "*The vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel. And people of Judah are his cherished plant*" In the responsorial psalm the psalmist writes, "*A vine from Egypt you transplanted; you drove away the nations and planted it.*" "*Yet I planted you as a choice vine*" is the message of God through Prophet Jeremiah. But in today's first reading we hear the lamentation of God over the failure of his vineyard in producing the best grapes. **Isaiah says, "Then he looked for the crop of grapes, but what it yielded was wild grapes."** In other words, people of Israel didn't come up to the expectations of God in their life style and they remained unfaithful to him.

In today's gospel Jesus brings out the same imagery of Israel, the vineyard, and Jesus adds the characters of tenants to it, who were supposed to take care of it. Here the grapes seem to be good, but the tenants were wicked and failed to give the due portion to the landlord. In this parable the roles of the characters are clear; God is the Landlord; Israel is the vineyard and the religious leaders are the tenants to whom the care of the people were given; the prophets are in the place of the servants whom God repeatedly sent to Israel and the Son is Jesus himself. God used all sorts of means to bring Israel back to faith; he sent the Prophets time to time and quite a few were killed and others were dishonored. In the fullness of time, God sent his own Son. But they mistreated him and killed him too.

This parable is the greatest example of the love and care God gives to his people. Remember, the owner didn't simply give a piece of land to the tenants and ask them to cultivate and produce grapes; rather he planted the vineyard, put fencing around it and installed a wine press too in it. So the tenants needed only to maintain the vineyard and harvest the grapes and give the share to the owner. **This is the way God treats each one of us. He gives us free gift of life, favorable life situations, talents, and means needed for us to live a fruitful life on earth.** In return God asks us to produce the good fruits or virtuous deeds by which we may make a little change in the community where we live in. In other words, we are sent into this world with a specific mission to accomplish.

When we cooperate with the plan of God the mission will be completed the way God wishes. *At the same time one has got the freedom either to accept God's plan or reject it.* In other words, God totally respects the human freewill and choices one makes. He will never dictate as what we have to do or how we have to act. It is we who have to use our prudence and make the right choices. When a tragedy happens in the world people ask, "Why couldn't God stop that?" Very often even a tragedy happens due to the misuse of the free will of some people or the wrong choice they make. Again, if God interferes with our free will and free choice, we will never be called human beings any longer and we will be lowered to the level of animals. *(Of course, we should not forget the sad fact that, these days many human beings act worse than the wild animals).* But at the same time it is the will of God that we may use our free will to do the right things.

This parable also is the clear example of God's patience with the people. He sent servants after servants and gave the tenants chances to change their deeds; finally he sent his only Son. Similarly, God will wait and wait and give us every opportunity to choose the right things and do the good things. Sometimes, you and I get upset with the long patience of God. We wish God could act rather quickly in certain cases. But God's patience is not unlimited. This parable also shows that at the end there will be a judgment by which the wrong doers will be eliminated from the kingdom of God. John the Baptist says, **"Therefore, every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."** (Mt. 3:10).

My friends, we are given this precious life only once and if we lose it by our wrong choices, it is we who are responsible for that. God should not be blamed for it. You and I have a mission to accomplish in this world before we leave. Let us recognize it and cooperate with God to finish it. One day then we will be counted among those faithful servants who invested the money of the master and multiplied it.