

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

In this morning's Gospel, we hear Jesus telling the parable about the landowner who planted a vineyard. Jesus tells this parable during the time between his triumphal entry into Jerusalem (i.e. Palm Sunday) and His Crucifixion. He was teaching in the Temple.

Along with planting the vineyard the landowner also planted a hedge around it to protect it. He dug a wine press in it and built a tower to hold the fruits of the vineyard. He then rented it to tenants and went away into a far country.

When it was time for the harvest, he sent his servants to receive the fruit from the tenants which was due him i.e. the rent. But instead of giving the rent to them the tenants decided to keep it for themselves. So, they beat one of the servants, and killed another, and stoned another.

The landowner then sent others and they did the same to them. Finally, he decided to send his own son. He was convinced that the tenants would respect his son and give him what was due him. But the tenants had no intention of paying the landowner what was due him. So, the tenants conspired to kill the son. Once there was no longer an heir to the vineyard all they had to do was wait for the landowner to pass away of old age and they could take complete possession of the vineyard for themselves. So, they killed the son.

Jesus then asked those listening to Him what will the owner of the vineyard do to these men?

The people said that he would destroy the wicked men and rent it out to other tenants to care for and would be willing to give him the fruits which he was entitled.

Then Jesus ended the parable by asking "Have you never read the Scripture: 'The very stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner; this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes?'" from Psalm 118.

Let's take a closer look at the parable. The landowner who planted the vineyard is God. The vineyard is the Jewish people, planted by God in the promise land. The hedge is the law which prevented them from mixing with the Gentiles, thus protecting them.

The winepress is the temple. And the first tenants are the teachers of the people, that is the Pharisees and scribes.

In the book of Exodus God spoke to the people in a pillar of cloud. And after the journey to the promised land God no longer spoke to the people in a pillar of cloud but sent prophets.

The time for the fruit is the time of the prophets. The servants who were sent are the prophets who were abused in various ways by the false teachers and leaders during this

time. These leaders of the Hebrew people rejected the prophets whom God had sent to them to proclaim His word.

Then, when the time was right, God sent his Son, even though He knew that the false leaders and teachers would kill him.

These leaders should have honored His Son since he was the messiah, but instead they rejected him. For, as we know, the leaders and teachers of the Jews conspired with the Romans to kill Jesus.

In the parable the vineyard is given to other tenants after the original tenants were destroyed.

In the year 70 AD, God sent the Roman army and destroyed the Jewish people who had rejected Jesus as the Christ. God then gave the vineyard to the apostles and their successors to care for. They were to shepherd the people, to teach them and to tend to them.

This parable was familiar to the people.

In Isaiah chapter 5 it is written:

"There was a vineyard for my Beloved, a place in power and richness. He placed a wall around it and fortified it. He planted it with the choicest vine. He built a tower in its midst and also made a winepress in it.

So, I waited for it to bring forth grapes, but it produced thorn plants. And now, men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, judge between Me and My vineyard.

What shall I yet do for My vineyard that I have not done for it? For I waited for it to bring forth grapes, but it produced thorn plants. But now I will tell you what I shall do to my vineyard: I shall remove its wall and it shall be for booty. I shall break down its wall and it shall be trampled underfoot. I will forsake My vineyard. It shall not be pruned or cultivated, but thorns shall sprout forth as in a barren land. I will also command the clouds not to rain on it.

For the vineyard of the Lord of host is the house of Israel, and the man of Judah is his beloved plant. I waited for it to bring forth judgment, but it brought lawlessness, and not righteousness but a cry."

The people would have realized that the parable Jesus had told was basically the same that Isaiah had told. Isaiah told the people that the Lord expected righteousness but instead gave lawlessness.

Jesus wanted the people to know that God wants righteousness, but the leaders instead rejected him and the prophets and gave forth lawlessness.

The chief priests and elders who are listening to Jesus must have been horrified at the conclusion to the parable. They knew only too well that they had been cast in the part of the rebellious tenants.

Jesus ended the parable by quoting Psalm 118:

“Have you never read the Scripture: ‘The very stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner; this was the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes?’”

This Psalm prophesied that the Messiah would be rejected, even though he had been chosen by God.

The Stone, that is the Messiah, which the builders, that is, the religious leaders would reject would bring the wrath of God to those who rejected it.

Hearing the words that Jesus had spoken and seeing the miracle that Jesus had performed the people knew that Jesus was a prophet, and many felt that he must surely be the Messiah.

In this parable Jesus had said many things.

He talked about God's protective care of his people which was theirs from the beginning even though they often turned away from him. They had abused his prophets even murdering some.

They often rejected his word and became lawless. Even with all this, God did not reject his people. He loved them so much that he sent his beloved Son which he had promised them.

We, as Christians, acknowledge that Jesus is the Messiah. And that his death was necessary. For in dying he rose from the dead in order to give us eternal life, to give us salvation.

For us to receive salvation we must do as St. Paul tells us in today's epistle.

We are to watch, to stand fast in the faith, to be brave, and to be strong. That we must let all that we do be done with love.

In our daily lives we must be cautious not to give in to the temptations which come upon us. So many things in this world try to draw us away from living a life of righteousness that Jesus has called us to live.

How many times have we been tempted not to love someone who is different than us?

How many times have we been tempted not to love someone who has a different belief than we do? This is not to say that all beliefs are the same, for they are not. It is to say that we must love them and that in loving them we must point out their error.

We want all people to have salvation. If we do not share our faith with them there is little hope that they will find salvation. So, we must be brave and be strong and share our faith whenever possible.

We must not fear the judgment of others when we share our faith. We do not stand on street corners berating people to believe as we do, nor do we tell people that they are condemned to hell if they do not believe as we do.

We must with share what we have, our faith, for it is the pearl of great price. If we truly love all creation, as God has called us to, then we must never hesitate to share our faith.

We do not harass people to come to church with us, but we should not hesitate to invite them.

We should not hesitate to fast on fasting days as if we are embarrassed to obey the teachings of the Church. We must take time to share with them why we are fasting.

If you were a vegan, as some of you are, you would not hesitate to say I don't eat meat because I'm a vegan. So why do you hesitate to say I'm not eating meat today in obedience to the teachings of my church.

So be watchful, stand fast in the faith be brave and be strong. Showing your love for God by doing all things in love.

We are all called to be righteous. So, hear the Word of God and obey, but we cannot obey without being filled with the Holy Spirit. And how are we filled with the Holy Spirit?

By prayer, by fasting, by giving alms to the poor, by confessing our sins, by receiving The Precious Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus in Holy Communion.

It is only by God's Grace that we can be righteous. We cannot do it on our own for every person falls short of the glory of God.