

Commentary for the 27th Sunday in Ordinary Time



The parable of the wicked tenants also appears with some variations in Mk 12: 1-12 and Lk 20: 9-18. In Matthew's gospel it is the second in a trilogy of judgment parables, preceded by the parable of the Two Sons and followed by the parable of the Marriage Feast.

Jesus addresses the parable to the chief priests and elders of the people. Using the vineyard image of Isaiah 5:1-7, he tells the story of a landowner who leases his vineyard to tenants, and goes on a journey. At harvest time, when he sends servants to obtain his produce, the tenants maltreat and even kill his servants. The landowner finally sends his son. The evil tenants kill the son, hoping thereby to acquire his inheritance.

After finishing the story, Jesus asks his hearers what they think the owner of the vineyard will do. They answer that the evil tenants will be put to death, and the vineyard will be leased to other tenants who will give him the produce at harvest time. Jesus then turns their own judgment against themselves: in the same way, the kingdom of God will be taken from them and given to a people who will produce good fruit.

Life Implications

As Brevard S. Childs points out in his book *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*, the key to recognizing the life implications of the parable lies in its link to the Old Testament. It is a "juridical parable" in which a prophet tells a story with the intention of drawing its hearers into bringing their

judgment back upon themselves. The classic example is the story Nathan told King David about the rich man who took a poor man's only ewe lamb to make a meal for a visitor. Nathan, like Jesus, waits for the hearer of the parable to make a judgment. David, of course, declares that the man who did the evil deed merits death. The prophet Nathan, alluding to David's sinful taking of Uriah's wife, says to the king: "You are the man" (2 Sam 12: 1-12).

This Sunday's homily will work if we are drawn into the extended meaning of the parable which Matthew develops. The tenants entrusted with God's vineyard, no longer in parable, but in reality, have killed many of his prophets and finally have killed his son, Jesus. What judgment will God make against these tenants? Our common sense readily makes the judgment that divine justice demands punishment for these evil deeds.

The crucial point of the homily is that Jesus, the now-vindicated Risen Lord, addresses each of us as tenants of God's vineyard today. He turns our judgment upon those who rejected him and the prophets before him back upon ourselves. Have we in fact produced the good fruit of justice and love? Do we at times forget that we are only tenants, and imagining ourselves as owners, we do as we please? Do we amass more of its fruit than we could possibly use while others die of starvation? Do we also act with violence against our fellow human beings, sons and daughters of God?

The prayer of our liturgy today is that we will receive the grace to open our hearts to the prophetic voice of Jesus and become a people who produce abundant good fruit in accord with God's will.

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