



My Beloved Ones,

On Friday September 1st, we are blessed to celebrate the beginning of a new Ecclesiastical Year. This date comes to us from the ancient practice of the Byzantine Empire, which established this harvest day as a day of taxation. On Monday September 4th, we will be fortunate to celebrate the secular American holiday of Labor Day. Therefore, it is a beautiful occurrence that this Sunday's Gospel reading takes place in a vineyard and involves workers. In our Lord's parable however, the tenants of the vineyard do not behave honorably.

When the owner of the vineyard wishes to inspect the harvest, and to receive His rightful fruit, He sends servants to represent Him. However, the tenants beat one, stone another, and kill the last. Again, the owner wishes to contact His tenants, and so He sends more servants—but these shameful actions are repeated. Finally, the owner reasons that they will respect His Son, but when His Son arrives, the tenants see a way to steal his inheritance, and so they murder Him as well.

The vineyard, of course, is earth, whose owner is God, and the tenants to whom he lets out the property were then the Israelites. Just as the owner wished to communicate with His tenants, God sent His servants, the prophets, to deliver His Word. Earlier this week, we even observed a solemn event which reflected the mistreatment of God's last prophet in the Beheading of John the Baptist. In this abuse, Christ is not only criticizing the frequent rejection of God's Word, as the Son of the Vineyard Owner, He is also predicting His own Crucifixion. However, the people to whom He is speaking still grasp the meaning of the parable, even without understanding their role in it. When He asks what the owner will do to the wicked tenants, the listeners correctly say that the owner will “...put those wretches to a miserable death, and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons” (*Matthew 21:41*). Christ ends His preaching quoting Psalm 118 which predicts that the rejected stone shall become the chief cornerstone, encouraging all to turn to Him.

My brothers and sisters, as we begin this Ecclesiastical New Year, I pray that we all take the time to examine what spiritual fruits we have produced for the Glory of God. The meaning of this parable was not simply historical; we too can reject our Creator's message, by not only disobeying His commandments, but by failing to cultivate a spirit of prayerful humility, and by rejecting those who come to us in a time of need. Christ makes it very clear that the gifts His Father bestowed to humanity can be easily taken from us and given to others who prove more worthy of them.

As we begin this new Ecclesiastical Year, approaching the time of harvest, let us work to ensure that we will be able to give a good account to the owner of the Vineyard when He returns to receive His fruit.

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