

The story of the wicked tenants generally represents God's dealings with Israel throughout salvation history. The property owner is God. The vineyard that he planted, around which he built a hedge, dug a vat and erected a tower, is his people. Those in charge of the vineyard are the elders of the people. The slaves that the owner sent to the vineyard are the prophets, which they abused and murdered.

This story, however, is also about Jesus. The owner of the vineyard, God, eventually sends his son, saying to Himself, that surely, they would respect my son, but they murdered him. This is a foretelling of Jesus' death. And finally, the story is about judgment. What will the owner do to these wicked men? When asked, the chief priests and the elders of the people reply, "He will bring that wicked crowd to a bad end and lease his vineyard out to others who will see to it that he has grapes at vintage time."

This story, above all else, illustrates the great mercy of God. Not only did God establish Israel as His chosen people, but He continually sought them when they went astray. And He persisted in sending them prophets, even though they mistreated and murdered them. And if that was not enough, God sent His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross for the sins of us all.

The astonishing patience and mercy of the vineyard owner would seem to us to be a kind of foolishness. This is not the kind of patience and mercy that we can fully understand as mere creatures. We must remember that His ways are not our ways. In the words of the prophet Isaiah,

<sup>6</sup> "Seek the LORD while he may be found,  
call upon him while he is near;

<sup>7</sup> let the wicked forsake his way,  
and the unrighteous man his thoughts;

let him return to the LORD, that he may have mercy on him,  
and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

<sup>8</sup> For my thoughts are not your thoughts,

neither are your ways my ways, says the LORD.  
<sup>9</sup>For as the heavens are higher than the earth,  
 so are my ways higher than your ways  
 and my thoughts than your thoughts (Isaiah 55:6-9).

The most remarkable thing here, about God's mercy, is that, despite the repeated wickedness of His people, He sends His *Son*. His *Son* is the second Person of the Holy Trinity who has truly taken on our human nature, and bore the justice that we deserve for our wickedness. In other words, God *Himself*, in human flesh, has come to His vineyard.

And who could have imagined, that this Son, calumniated, tortured and put to death, would become the keystone of the structure, that is, of the New People of God, the New Vineyard. Recall that the owner of the vineyard was to lease it out to others who would see to it that he had grapes at vintage time. This story, then, is not merely about the ancient people of Israel or the religious leaders and people at the time of Jesus. You can be assured that it is also about *us*. And He

continues to seek us out because He loves us and desires to give us His mercy.

People sometimes ask, "Why hasn't the Lord returned already, for His second coming? It's been more than 2000 years. What appears to us as a delay, is due to our human way of thinking. It's actually God's mercy. The Apostle Peter explains.

<sup>8</sup>Do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. <sup>9</sup>The Lord is not slow about his promise as some count slowness, but is forbearing toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. <sup>10</sup>But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away [...] and the works that are upon it will be burned up. <sup>11</sup>Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of persons ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, [...] according to his promise we wait for [a] new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells (2 Peter 3:7-13).

Thus, the Lord, in every generation, in every year, month, day, even in every minute that He gives us here on

earth, there is an overflow of His Divine Mercy toward us.

God, in his unfathomable mercy, holds off His coming

judgment because, as St. Paul says in his second letter to

Timothy, “[God] desires all men to be saved and to come to

the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim 2:4).

But remember what St. Peter said, “the day of the Lord will come like a thief”. We must not be caught off guard. Let none of us put off repentance, but confess our serious sins and do penance. Let us seek Him in prayer, and practice the virtues. Each one of us must take advantage of whatever time remains for us here on earth. We must use all the means of holiness that He has given us, particularly, in receiving the Holy Eucharist worthily and with deep devotion. With all of our strength, we must strive to produce fruit for the Lord.

Just as the owner expected a harvest of fruit at vintage time, so the Lord expects a harvest from us. It was the property

owner, was it not, who planted the vineyard, put a hedge around it, dug out a vat and erected a tower? Should he not expect His vineyard to produce fruit for him? The Lord has given us, not only our existence, and all the good things that we enjoy, but He has given us everything for our salvation, including *Himself*. He has given us all the grace that we need, that we might produce the fruit of virtue and holiness, be pleasing to Him, inherit eternal life and be happy with Him forever.

But let us remember, for all His goodness to us, His mercy, His agony and sacrifice on the cross for our sins, for all that He has done for us and given to us, we must render an account. In the words of St. Paul:

...we make it our aim to please him. <sup>10</sup> For all of us must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may receive recompense for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil (2 Cor. 5:9-10).

We only need to think about the parable of the separation of the sheep from the goats. The goats are sent off to eternal punishment while the sheep to eternal life.

Some people, however, would have you ignore this teaching of our Lord or they try to explain it away. These people say that God would never do such a thing to anyone because He is all loving. Unfortunately, this is a popular way of thinking these days among many Christians, and even among many Catholics. It is, of course, a very uncomfortable teaching of our Lord. Perhaps we don't like to think about it because of those serious sins for which we have not repented and confessed. Perhaps we don't like to remember God's just punishment because we want to continue with our love for the things of this world and our constant pursuit of pleasures and comforts. Is it not true that pursuing a life of pleasures and comforts is often more important to us than the love of God? But loving God above all things is the first and greatest commandment. Besides all this, it is also difficult for us to

understand, that between His love and His justice, there is no contradiction. How can this be?

In the last verse of today's Gospel, Jesus asks the Chief Priests and the elders, "Did you never read in the Scriptures, 'The stone which the builders rejected has become the keystone of the structure?'" There is a passage that follows this, which was not included in today's reading; it refers to this stone. The stone is Jesus Christ, and He says that, "he who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and when it falls on any one, it will crush him" (v.44). The Greek word here is to *pulverize*, to grind to dust.

A large and weighty stone like this symbolizes that God is unchangeable and almighty. God does not change; He is infinitely perfect. He cannot change; not even for our sake, no matter the vastness of His love for us. When Moses asked for God's name, while on Mount Horeb, God simply replied, "I am

who I am". This is a Hebrew idiom, which is very much like what we say today. "It is what it is". God is who He is; He does not change.

God is also almighty. When Moses asked to look upon the face of God, God replied, "No man may look upon the face of God and live". Can we begin to see what a direct encounter with the unchangeable and almighty God would be like for us mere mortals? The letter to the Hebrews says, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb 10:31).

God is who He is, and no one can bear His unchangeable awesomeness without a supernatural grace. He continually offers this to us, but we reject His grace by our sins and lack of repentance. More simply, if we love the world more than Him, and then, we are faced with Him, what will we do? How shall we bear it? It is not for God to change; He cannot, but for us to change. In His infinite mercy, He wants

us to be with Him and experience eternal happiness.

Remember that we are made for God. He is the fulfillment of our longings for happiness. He is the goodness, the truth, the beauty, the love for which the human heart longs.

Yet, He is almighty, like a raging river. Our rebellion against Him, by our sins, is like us jumping into the rapids and trying to hold the waters back or trying to change the course of the river. We are simply swept away. Is it the fault of the river that we are punished by it, or is it not our own foolishness?

All of our sins are an offence against God, but God is our ultimate happiness and fulfillment. So, when we sin, we are attacking our own happiness. Don't we see that we make our selves miserable by our sins? Don't we see that our unrepented sins make us unhappy? They destroy happiness. So, let us not delay in striving to love Him with all our mind, all

our heart and all our strength. It should be the number one goal of our lives above all things, else, death will come like a thief in the night, and it will be too late.

God sends such dire warnings to us out of His infinite love. And His love is the reason for His long-suffering. It is the reason that He would go so far as to become one like us in all ways but sin. God Himself has visited His vineyard, He suffer for us and gave up His life for us. Let us love Him in return and be happy with Him forever.