



OPENING PRAYER

Guide: *God, protect your Church, the vineyard of the Lord.*

All: Lord, watch over us from heaven; take care of this vine, and protect what your right hand has planted.

Guide: *I have chosen you, says the Lord, to bear fruit, a long lasting fruit.*

All: Lord, you are the vine and we are the branches. Do not let us become separated from you.

Leader: *Let us invoke the presence of God:*

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and renew the face of the earth.

O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit have instructed the hearts of the faithful grant that by the same Spirit we may truly wise and ever enjoy His consolations.

Through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

First Reading [Isaiah 5 (1-7)]

Let me now sing of my friend, my friend's song concerning his vineyard.

My friend had a vineyard on a fertile hillside; he spaded it, cleared it of stones, and planted the choicest vines; within it he built a watchtower, and hewed out a wine press. Then he looked for the crop of grapes, but what it yielded was wild grapes.

Now, inhabitants of Jerusalem and people of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard:

What more was there to do for my vineyard that I had not done? Why, when I looked for the crop of grapes, did it bring forth wild grapes?

Now, I will let you know what I mean to do with my vineyard: take away its hedge, give it to grazing, break through its wall, let it be trampled! Yes, I will make it a ruin: it shall not be pruned or hoed, but overgrown with thorns and briars; I will command the clouds not to send rain upon it.

The vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the people of Judah are his cherished plant; he looked for judgment, but see, bloodshed! for justice, but hark, the outcry!

Commentaries

The *Canticle of the Vineyard* is a beautiful, poetic composition from the book of Isaiah that praises the friend's love and dedication for his vineyard. The text begins in a warm, gentle tone and explains that the owner of the vineyard, moved by a great love, has devoted all his efforts to care for the crop of grapes. However, his expectations were in vain because instead of good grapes, the vineyard produced sour grapes.

The original text in Hebrew expresses the Lord's disappointment by making a play on words with similar sounds: God expected *mishpát* (judgment) and finds *mispa* (bloodshed), and desired *sedaqa* (justice) and finds *seaqa* (outcry).

We then realize that this poem is actually a parable about the relationship between God and his people. The prophet tells the story in such a way that his audience agrees that the vineyard deserves to be abandoned. The vineyard represents the people of Israel: the Lord has loved and cared for them, without been able to gather the desired fruits.

Reflection

- (1) Whom does the prophet call "my friend"?
- (2) Is your relationship with God such that you would feel comfortable calling him "my friend"?
- (3) Do you think that the owner was patient and gave the vine enough opportunities to produce good fruit?
- (4) Read Luke 13 (6-9). What does it draw to mind in relation to the passage above?
- (5) Do you think God respects your freedom to choose to be good or sour grapes?
- (6) How do you feel the love of God has been present in your life?

Second Reading [Philippians 4 (6-9)]

Brothers and sisters:

Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God. Then the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing what you have learned and received and heard and seen in me.

Then the God of peace will be with you.

Commentaries

The letter to the Philippians best shows the intimate and caring character of the apostle Paul. Towards its end, Paul's letter contains many recommendations for which Christians should strive. We find an invitation to live without anxieties, but rather with a peace that is only possible for those who have a close relationship with God. That's why Paul's focus immediately shifts to prayer: Christians should live in a constant, confident dialogue, with the Lord, knowing that we are safe in his loving hands. Prayerful dialogue may take different modes, such as thanksgiving, praise, repentance, petition, intercession.

In addition to prayer, Paul mentions other virtues that Christians should practice. The text concludes with an invitation that is found in other writings of the apostle: to emulate him. We should never misunderstand this invitation as an exaltation of his own person or a cult to his personality, which is seen many times in others who seek to become leaders of the community. Paul's invitation is to imitate the authentic Christian lifestyle that was born in him after his profound and radical conversion; the conviction that moved him to give his life for the construction of the Church, what granted him the right to be called 'apostle' even though he was not a follower of Jesus when he walked the Holy Land with his disciples.

Reflection

- (1) What kind of situations may cause you most fear, distress, and concerns?
- (2) Do you think God may help you in those situations that cause such feelings? How? Is it possible to remove the anxiety from your heart? What other kind of feeling would take its place?
- (3) How many types of prayer are there?
- (4) Define the following terms: "true", "honorable", "just", "pure", "lovely", "worthy of praise". Are they those terms applicable only to Christians? How does a Christian understand and embody those qualities differently from the ways others do?
- (5) Can you share some moment in which the Lord flooded your life with his peace?

Gospel [Matthew 21 (33-43)]



Jesus said to the chief priests and the elders of the people:
"Hear another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a hedge around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a tower. Then he leased it to tenants and went on a journey. When vintage time drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants to obtain his produce. But the tenants seized the servants and one they beat, another they killed, and a third they stoned.
Again he sent other servants, more numerous than the first ones, but they treated them in the same way.
Finally, he sent his son to them, thinking, 'They will respect my son.'

But when the tenants saw the son, they said to one another, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and acquire his inheritance.' They seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him.
What will the owner of the vineyard do to those tenants when he comes?"
They answered him, "He will put those wretched men to a wretched death and lease his vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the proper times."

Jesus said to them, "Did you never read in the Scriptures: The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; by the Lord has this been done, and it is wonderful in our eyes? Therefore, I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that will produce its fruit."

Commentaries

This parable can be found in the three synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke). Jesus tells it in the corridors of the temple in Jerusalem, just before the Passion narrative of Jesus occurs. Within the temple corridor, several discussions occur with the authorities and people tied to the fundamentalist compliance of the law. For this reason, this parable, which is an immediate continuation of the text that was proclaimed last Sunday, contains a hard, harsh message.

The prophet Isaiah's story about the vineyard has been chosen to accompany this gospel passage because of its parallelism, in both form and content. In both cases, the vineyard is the image of the people of Israel, and the parable is as a kind of summary of the relationship between God and Israel. It is not difficult to identify the servants with the prophets that God was sent. And even more distinguished is the similarity between the son with Jesus himself, who died "out of the vineyard", anticipating that Jesus would be executed outside the walls of Jerusalem.

The story stresses the similarity of the Jewish contemporaries of Jesus with the leaders of the past centuries that rejected the message transmitted by the prophets. However, it is healthy to remember that this rejection of God's message was done by the Jewish authorities and some of their followers, and not of the entire Jewish people. We need to remember that the first Christians emerged from among the Jews, and that the first conversions occurred in the town. These early Christians who built the Church stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the Gentiles (non-Jews) to comply with the prediction of Jesus "you will be given to a people that produces its fruits".

Reflection

- (1) What relationship existed between the vineyards and the owner of the vineyard? Did they have the right to manage the vineyard?
- (2) If the tenants had presented the results expected by the owner of the vineyard, what do you think he would have done?
- (3) To whom was the vineyard entrusted originally? Did the original chosen people perform as expected? Who are the new chosen people, (the new holders of the vineyard)?
- (5) Do you think the new holders of the vineyard are producing the fruits that the owner expects to receive? As a laborer in the vineyard, are you complying with what's expected of you?
- (6) What do you think are the fruits that the Lord expects collect from the Church?

CLOSING PRAYER

Leader: *Lord of the day and night, of the beginning and of the end: At the closing of this meeting, once again we lift up our hearts to You, divine source of all life.*

All: We thank you for the gifts you have bestowed on us. We thank you for the love expressed in companionship and understanding, mutual respect and shared ideas. We give you thanks for your holy power that will help us in our concerns that we have shared. For these and all the gifts that come from You, we give you thanks.

Leader: *Lord hear our prayers* (attendees can propose their own needs of prayer)

All: In the same way in which we have being blessed by your presence as we meet, we ask now to bless our safe return to our homes. May your holy blessing be over us + in the name of the Father and of the Son...

Leader: *May the King of the eternal glory gather us together in His heavenly banquet. Amen.*

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