

27th Sunday of Ordinary Time

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."

Mt 21:33-43

This story is fast and brutal. Despite the fact that the opening image is taken from Isaiah's beautiful song of the vineyard, the story itself doesn't have any of its longing and sadness.

It's drawn for us by Jesus in three short steps: each one more decisive, cruel, and insane. It feels like a series of deranged actions. The tenants, rather than worrying about the vine and the fruit, become more and more greedy and bloodthirsty. Their anger and their greed lead them ultimately to the madness of killing the son of the owner.

The landowner is also acting surprisingly. He behaves like a father who must battle his children. Instead of defeating them quickly, he raises the stakes by giving more and more of himself. Rather than fighting for the vineyard, he would prefer to protect their lives. Every time the tenants refuse to talk to him, he becomes increasingly desperate and more generous.

The tenants do not listen and they do not understand.

Why is it that the acts of love are seen as aggression? How is it possible that the peaceful vineyard becomes a field of unbridled greed and unquenchable jealousy? How is it that those

who refuse to work to bring fruit of the vine now want to possess the whole vineyard? Why does an act of trust - "They will respect my son" - become a pretext to madness - "Let us kill him and acquire his inheritance"? Do they expect that when the son dies, the owner will give up the vineyard?

The story is told to the chief priest and the elders of the people, but it fits humanity too well at every stage and in every circumstance. It illustrates well the decay of societies, the corruption of the churches, the insane logic of the destruction of culture.

I can recognize signs of the logic of this story everywhere around me. I can see human convictions that, without any reflection, become brutal ideologies. I can see debates that abandon humanity and become just a slug-fest. I can see people turning against their own identity and their own history, hoping to fulfill their dreams by erasing others.

There doesn't seem to be any way out. Did we somehow fit the story so well that the ultimate catastrophe is unavoidable?

But Jesus is not the one who comes to this world to give us a description of reality, even if it's very accurate. His words are the good news, the call of the Father for us to return to our original dignity in Him. So we hear a verse from the Psalm:

The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.

By the Lord has this been done, and it is wonderful in our eyes.

The landowner illustrates the actions of the Father. His response to ungratefulness, selfishness, and cruelty is love. This is who he is, and he cannot be changed by our sinfulness. The son, who in our logic looks like a final victim of our greed, is in fact a free gift from the father. That gift defeats the logic of death. Something that was supposed to be the final insult to the Father becomes the ultimate blessing because it is freely given by God. The stone that the crazy builders rejected becomes the true foundation of life, the miracle of life, the miracle of life of God.

The story becomes a preparation for the great mystery of the cross. The cross of Jesus Christ defeats the logic of greed. When the Son dies by our hand, and seemingly our hope of meeting the Landowner dies with him, we realize how wrong we were.

The gift of the son offered on the cross reverses the whole logic of this world. It is that free gift that makes us heirs; the dignity we so much desired is given to us freely. By his endless generosity the Father makes brothers and sisters out of the jealous competitors.

The most amazing miracle of God - he never gives up on his people. When you see Jesus Christ on the cross, when you receive the endless flow of love out of his heart, you become a new people, the people who produce the fruit, the people who fulfill the ultimate promise of creation.