

“Life is simple, it’s just not easy.”

Many years ago, I was giving an R.C.I.A. presentation, when one of the candidates from an evangelical religious upbringing asked me, “Why can’t the Church just say what is right and what is wrong? People are confused these days. When Jesus spoke to the people of his days, they knew what he meant.”

My response was, “have you ever heard this parable?” I proceeded to read the Gospel we hear this Sunday.

Jesus’ parables were not meant to be simple. Today’s parable of the *Wicked Tenants* is one of both love and judgment. The parable reminds us that God is in charge—that all things come from God, and that God is foremost a loving and merciful God.

The Gospel is always about God’s actions, God’s love, and God’s challenge to us. It is this firm belief that has kept me going as a priest and pastor for almost thirty years!

Never let love and mercy be understood as a sign of weakness. Being a follower of Christ means being open to both his love and his judgment.

The parable is not about *them* (the rejection of the Jews); it is about *us*. It is about our responsibility for God's vineyard. It is about the harvest that is due to God. The harvest of goodness, love, and care for all our brothers and sisters.

And finally, today we celebrate our 23rd anniversary as the parish of St. Francis of Assisi. It has always been a challenge for me to think clearly about Francis.

The first thing that comes to mind is the gentle saint who preached to birds, tamed wolves, and padded about in flower-filled fields basking in the love of God.

However, it's also difficult to imagine how such a benign figure could turn thirteenth-century Europe upside down. And then I go back to where I began this reflection, "*the parable is not meant to be simple.*"

We come to the Eucharist to confess our sins and to experience God's love and mercy. We thank God for "an only Son" who came not to show the world that life is simple, but wonderfully complex. Let us ask God for the courage to face all the layers of meaning.

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