

FIRST READING*Isaiah 5:1-7*

Let me sing for my beloved my love song concerning his vineyard: My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. He dug it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines; he built a watchtower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it; and he looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes. And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. What more was there to do for my vineyard, that I have not done in it? When I looked for it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes? And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured; I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down. I will make it a waste; it shall not be pruned or hoed, and briars and thorns shall grow up; I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it. For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are his pleasant planting; and he looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold, an outcry!

RESPONSORIAL PSALM*Ps 80(79):9, 12, 13-14, 15-16, 19-20. R Isaiah 5:7a***R. The vineyard of the Lord is the house of Israel.**

You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it. It stretched out its branches to the sea; to the River it stretched out its shoots. R.

Then why have you broken down its walls? It is plucked by all who pass by the way. It is ravaged by the boar of the forest, devoured by the beasts of the field. R.

God of hosts, turn again, we implore; look down from heaven and see. Visit this vine and protect it, the stock your right hand has planted, the son you have claimed for yourself. R.

And we shall never forsake you again; give us life that we may call upon your name. Bring us back, O Lord God of hosts; let your face shine forth, and we shall be saved. R.

R. The vineyard of the Lord is the house of Israel.

SECOND READING*Philippians 4:6-9*

Brothers and Sisters: Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise: think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me - practise these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Alleluia, alleluia. I chose you out of the world, says the Lord, that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should abide. Alleluia.

GOSPEL

Matthew 21:33-43

At that time: Jesus said to the chief priests and the elders of the people, 'Hear another parable. There was a master of a house who planted a vineyard and put a fence round it and dug a wine press in it and built a tower and leased it to tenants, and went into another country. When the season for fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants to get his fruit. And the tenants took his servants and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. Again he sent other servants, more than at first. And they did the same to them. Finally he sent his son to them, saying, "They will respect my son." But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, "This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and have his inheritance." And they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?' They said to him, 'He 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.' Jesus said to them, 'Have you never read in the Scriptures: "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes"? Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits.'

REFLECTION

The vineyard in Isaiah has been prepared with extraordinary care. The ground is cleared, the vines are chosen, the wall and tower are built, and the wine press stands ready. Nothing has been withheld. The grief of the song lies in the question, 'What more was there to do for my vineyard?' Love has been poured into it, but the fruit never comes. Jesus takes up that image and sharpens it. The tenants behave as though the vineyard belongs to them. They enjoy its shelter and harvest, but refuse the owner his fruit. Even the arrival of the son becomes, in their eyes, an opportunity to seize the inheritance. St John Chrysostom sees here the patience of God, who sends messenger after messenger before sending the Son. St Irenaeus hears the whole history of salvation within the parable - God continues to call a people who will receive the Son and bear the fruit of faith. The warning is not addressed only to somebody else. The Church can also begin to behave as though the vineyard were ours - our building, our tradition, our preferences, and our comfort - while forgetting the fruit for which it was planted. God looks for justice, mercy, holiness, and lives made fruitful in love. At Mass we receive the Son whom the tenants rejected, the stone whom the builders cast aside and God made the cornerstone. We aren't being asked to manufacture fruit by anxious effort. We are being drawn back to Christ, in whom the vineyard is restored, so that his life may ripen in us and become a harvest offered gladly to the Father.

Church Fathers: St John Chrysostom, Homily 68 on Matthew; St Irenaeus, Against Heresies 4.36.