



13TH SUNDAY OF MATTHEW

September 3

THE GOSPEL READING

Matthew 21:33-42

[Leaders Mistreat God's Messengers]

The Lord said this parable, "There was a householder who planted a vineyard, and set a hedge around it, and dug a wine press in it, and built a tower, and let it out to tenants, and went into another country. When the season of 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 the first; and they did the same to them. Afterward 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 cast 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 very stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner; this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes?'"



GREEK ORTHODOX
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DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

THE SERMON

Before the Crucifixion of our Lord, during Holy Week, He enters triumphantly into Jerusalem, on Palm Sunday. He goes to the Temple and cleanses it from those who were misusing it for their own profit. This is a symbol of the Messiah (Christ) filling the true Temple, the Church, with His presence, blessing, and love. From that time, through several *parables* (a parable is a simple story used to illustrate a moral or spiritual lesson, as told by Jesus in the Gospels), the Lord begins to teach and reveal to the people and the religious leaders that He is the Messiah (Christ).

In this parable, He teaches us about His grace, which He gives to us even when we fall. In the parable of the vineyard, the Lord is once again cleansing the Temple, that is, teaching us that His gifts are not for our selfish profit but for us to work with His grace towards our salvation.

Vineyards are very familiar to His listeners. They are a symbol of the Lord's people, and appear several times in the Old Testament. The Prophets of that time, inspired by the Holy Spirit, often referred to the vineyard of the Lord, referring to His people.

Through the parable, Jesus teaches us that the owner of the vineyard, *who is the Lord Himself*, will not give it up to wicked servants and thieves who mistreat and murder the ones sent to them. The owner of the vineyard, who is the father of the son, will come and settle the account of the vineyard. The owner (householder) is God, the son is Christ, the vineyard is the whole creation, and we are the tenants.

This parable summarizes the history of salvation. God created this world and placed us in it to protect and preserve it. However, we turned away from God, Who is the source of life. As human beings, when we live in ways that take us away from God's grace, we are truly saying, *my will be done, not God's*.

God has done everything for us and our salvation. Saint John Chrysostom says, "What pertained to the husbandmen (farmer), He Himself did, the hedging it round about, the planting the vineyard, and all the rest, and He left little for them to do; to take care of what was there, and to preserve what was given to them; nothing was left undone, but all accomplished . . . they had enjoyed such great blessings from Him."

During the Divine Liturgy, we hear, "You brought us out of nothing into being, and when we had fallen away, You raised us up again. You left nothing undone until you had led us up to heaven and granted us Your Kingdom, which is to come. For all these things, we thank You and Your only-begotten Son and Your Holy Spirit."

When we forget this, we are rejecting God's mercy and His will to heal us. We turn our backs on all the servants of the Lord in the Church, those who call us to repentance and to bear spiritual fruit. We turn away from the Apostles, the Martyrs, the Church Fa-

thers, the Saints, holy spiritual guides, and all God's servants whom He sends to take us back to God in repentance.

When we do so, we turn away from God. When we seek to take all the gifts of the Lord for ourselves, while rejecting the Lord Who gives the gifts, we are crucifying Him *again*. All things have been given to us so that we can utilize them for the benefit of all. In this sense, we are all priests. We offer back ourselves, one another, and all things to Christ our God.

God's gifts are many. When we abuse ourselves, one another, *and* creation, we turn away from God. When we seek to use others and the world for our profit and not for the good of one another, we are rejecting the Son who comes to gather the fruit of the vineyard which He has given us.

We are the workers of the vineyard, and we are the vineyard itself. We work to serve one another, and we are given the power through the Holy Sacraments, to become and bear fruit. We are planted by the Lord, we are protected by His hedge, and we are kept by His watchtower.

Yet, when we sin against the Lord, He does not abandon us. He sent us Prophets and righteous people in the time of the Old Testament to prepare us for the coming of the Messiah (Christ). When He came to earth, we killed Him by our own sin and selfishness. Yet again, He didn't abandon us, and He didn't punish us. He humbled Himself, took our own sin upon His shoulders, and gifted us with the hope of the Resurrection and the power of the Holy Spirit.

In our lives on earth, even today, God continues to send us holy people to enlighten and guide us. They might be clergy, they might be monastics (monks and nuns), and they might be lay people such as our next-door neighbor. God also gives us signs that we are walking on the wrong side of the road instead of toward salvation. Why? Because He wants all of us to be saved and united with Him.

When we do not receive God's love and messages from the ones sent to us by Him, we reject His love and grace. We become like the servants who tried to take away the vineyard for their own profit. On the other hand, when we realize that everything we are, everything we have, and the whole creation, are all gifts of God to us, we can do no other than to offer all things to Him. We receive His Word, His Son, and the ones who call us back to God when we go astray. The Lord is the vine; we are the branches. When we turn to Him, we become a beautiful and cultivated vineyard that bears fruit for His glory and our salvation.