

**SPIRITUALITY**

**GOSPEL ACCLAMATION**

cf. John 15:16

R<sup>7</sup>. Alleluia, alleluia.

I have chosen you from the world, says the Lord, to go and bear fruit that will remain.

R<sup>7</sup>. Alleluia, alleluia.

**Gospel** Matt 21:33-43; L139A

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.”

**Reflecting on the Gospel**

We expect promises to be kept. We expect contracts to be fulfilled. We expect directions to be followed. Despite our expectations, however, deep down we know there is no guarantee that our expectations of integrity, doing what is right, being reliable will be met. How true this was for the landowner in this Sunday’s gospel parable who leases his vineyard to tenants. He presumed that the tenants would fulfill their half of the agreement. How wrong he was! The landowner carefully

planned for his vineyard; the tenants carefully planned how they could seize what did not belong to them. Oh, how misguided some planning can be! How misguided and deadly some decisions and actions can be!

Jesus tells a parable about a landowner who carefully plants, protects, and equips his vineyard, and about tenants who take progressively more violent steps to usurp what is not theirs. With these words Jesus issues judgment against the chief priests and elders to whom he directs the parable in no uncertain terms:

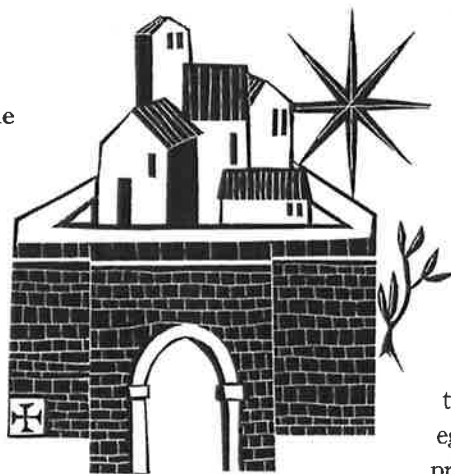
“the kingdom of God will be taken away from you / and given to a people that will produce its fruit.” Indeed, the kingdom of God will be taken from anyone who acts egregiously against the norms of righteousness. The chief priests and elders. Even us. It will be given to those who remain faithful to the Son, the Cornerstone. Anyone.

As a metaphor for the kingdom of heaven, it is obvious that the vineyard belongs solely and exclusively to God: God owns it, builds it, does all that is necessary to protect it. We are the laborers invited into the kingdom to tend the divine vineyard, to produce an abundance of fruit. Ironically, the vineyard which the wicked tenants attempt to gain by violence is freely given to those of us who will work faithfully to produce its fruit. We are those new tenants who produce fruit because we surrender our self-will to God and accept Jesus as the One who shows the way. By so doing we gain everything. Apart from Jesus we tenants can do nothing on our own, but with Jesus as our Cornerstone we can do anything that is expected of us.

**Living the Paschal Mystery**

Many of us throw our whole hearts into what we are doing, with great expectations of success. We want to get ahead. We do our best if for no other reason than to look good. We can readily identify with the two vineyard owners in both the first reading and gospel. They put their whole hearts into their vineyard, doing everything they can to assure fruit. This describes aptly God’s ways with us. God puts all the divine heart into coaxing us to be good and faithful tenants, cooperating with the divine will to produce an abundance of fruit.

After all this talk, what is the fruit of the kingdom? What is it we are to produce? Here is the real twist of the gospel: the fruit of the kingdom is the *life* God offers, but the only way to produce that fruit is *to die to self!* Just like the gospel tenants and the landowner’s son (but for very different reasons), we get “killed” ourselves. That is, we must die to ourselves in order to do the work God asks of us and to inherit the abundance of life God offers. Finally, then, the kingdom does involve a kind of violence: our rooting out anything that keeps us from growing in relationship to God and hearing his word, our dying to self so that we can do God’s will.



*Continued in Appendix A, p. 298.*

## Focusing the Gospel

**Key words and phrases:** landowner who planted, tenants . . . beat . . . killed . . . stoned, will respect my son, killed him, cornerstone, kingdom of God . . . taken from . . . given to

**To the point:** Jesus tells a parable about a landowner who carefully plants, protects, and equips his vineyard, and about tenants who take progressively more violent steps to usurp what is not theirs. With these words Jesus issues judgment against the chief priests and elders in no uncertain terms: “the kingdom of God will be taken away from you / and given to a people that will produce its fruit.” Indeed, the kingdom of God will be taken from anyone who acts egregiously against the norms of righteousness. The chief priests and elders. Even us. It will be given to those who remain faithful to the Son, the Cornerstone. Anyone.

## Connecting the Gospel

**to the first reading:** The vineyard owners in both the first reading and gospel do all they need to do to assure a good vintage. But an abundant vintage is never assured: the yield may be “wild grapes” or the yield may be stolen by greedy tenants. In both readings the outcome is judgment against infidelity.

**to experience:** Jesus’ judgment in this gospel is definitive. But our behaviors are not always so. Sometimes we find ourselves acting like the tenants; sometimes like those who are faithful. What remains steady is the Cornerstone.

## Connecting the Responsorial Psalm

**to the readings:** Psalm 80 was a communal lament written at some point in history when the nation of Israel underwent ruin at the hands of an enemy. In it the people ask God why this has been done and beg God to “once again” give “new life” to this vine transplanted from Egypt. The first reading relates the same tragedy. God destroys the vineyard Israel because, despite assiduous planning and care, it has produced nothing but “wild grapes.” The gospel presents a different slant on the same scenario. In this case, it is not the vineyard which proves fruitless and unfaithful, but its appointed caretakers.

Whether we are the vineyard or the ones charged with caring for the vineyard, this is not the first time we have turned our backs on the God who calls us into being and then sustains us. Nor will it be the last time. “Once again” and many times over we will need to cry out: Please, God, save us; please, God, start over with us! And God always will.

**to psalmist preparation:** As in last Sunday’s responsorial psalm, this Sunday’s psalm sings of God’s mercy and care when we fail in faith no surprise; the marvel is God’s unflagging efforts to redeem us. Is God “once again” offering you another chance? Where is God offering it to the church? Where is God “once again” offering it

## ASSEMBLY & FAITH-SHARING GROUPS

- In this parable, I identify with . . . Jesus identifies me as . . .
- I sense having a share in the kingdom of God when . . . I fear losing a share in the kingdom of God when . . .
- I build my life on Jesus the Cornerstone when I . . .

## PRESIDERS

My preaching stirs up in the assembly a desire to live more faithfully in the kingdom of God when . . .

## DEACONS

When I build my ministry of serving others on the Cornerstone who is Jesus, the kingdom . . .

## HOSPITALITY MINISTERS

My hospitality ministry is a way of planting, protecting, and equipping the kingdom of God when I . . .

## MUSIC MINISTERS

What helps me remember that God is the owner of the “vineyard” of my music ministry is . . . When I remember this, my music making sounds like . . .

## ALTAR MINISTERS

My serving produces good fruit in that . . .

## LECTORS

My manner of proclamation is a judgment on my living in the kingdom of God, and so . . .

## EXTRAORDINARY MINISTERS OF HOLY COMMUNION

My proclaiming “The Body [Blood] of Christ” calls forth a faithful “Amen” from communicants when I . . .

## Twenty-Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time, October 8, 2017

### Gospel (cont.)

Matt 21:33-43; L139A

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.”