

Dear Brothers and Sisters



‘There was a landowner who planted a vineyard...’

Few cultivated crops or plants are so completely dependent on both the careful, skilled work of a gardener and on the rhythm of the seasons as the vine. The Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments, refer constantly to the vine, the vineyard, and the vine-dresser. The highly esteemed vine is touched with mystery. It is worth nothing except in its fruit. While the wood of the vine is worthless (Ezekiel 15,2) and the barren branches good only for the fire (John 15,60), the fruit of the vine makes ‘gods and men’ happy (Judges 9,13).

The God of Israel is the spouse and vinedresser of the vine which is His people. But this spousal relationship is marked by unfaithfulness, a lack of gratitude and infidelity. For the prophet Hosea, Israel is a fruitful plant which gives thanks for its fruitfulness to others, rather than the God who is her spouse by the covenant. Isaiah says that God loves his vine and he has done everything for it; but instead of the anticipated fruit of justice, his vine-harvest has been poured out blood; therefore, he will hand over his plant to despoilers. For Jeremiah, Israel is a chosen plant become degenerate and barren, to be uprooted and trampled. Finally, Ezekiel speaks of the fertile vine which dries up and is burned, and applies this to an Israel unfaithful to God.

It is against this background that Jesus speaks of the parable in the Gospel we hear at Mass today.

Israel refused to listen to the prophets who were sent to her. She did so because the prophets were never politically correct; they did not say what Israel wanted to hear. The prophets’ words are always a call to sincerity, to authenticity, to truth, and to conversion of heart.

There are prophets in our life. Not to listen to them means lack of justice and bloodshed. Justice is defined as ‘rendering to others what is their due’. What is due to others? Respect, courtesy, understanding, a listening ear, a helping hand, a shoulder to help carry a burden, a kindness unrewarded; in other words, forgiveness of their sins, Love.

Lack of justice always means death, bloodshed. “If you call your brother/sister ‘fool’ you have already murdered him in your heart” Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount. Saint John tells us in his First Letter, that ‘we know that we have passed from death to life because we love our brother’.

Love is the fruit of the vine which we have been cultivated to produce. This fruit, however, can only be given if we are united to Christ. He is the one who has not slandered, not hated, not shown violence to others, has rendered justice. He has loved by dying to himself for the sake of even the ungrateful and unfaithful.

Isaiah prophesied that a day will come when the vine flourishes under God’s watchful care. To this we, the new Israel, call on God’s faithful love asking that He save the vine he transplanted from Egypt to His land, the vine he had to leave to destruction and fire.

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