



**Orthodox Mission of the  
Entrance of the Theotokos  
into the Temple**

**306 W. Main Street  
Emmitsburg, MD 21727**

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***The Wicked Husbandmen***  
**September 19, 2021**

**Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,**

**Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!**

*Hear another 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.... (Matthew 21:33 ff.)*

The Gospel lesson for this coming Sunday records one of our Lord's parables, the one that we called "The Parable of the Wicked Husbandman" when I was growing up. The essence of the story that makes up the parable is that a foreign landowner buys a vineyard and appoints "husbandmen," or hired tenants of sorts, to see to the proper operation of the vineyard in his absence. In the story, these tenants or "husbandmen" as they were called in old English, did not do their job. They took advantage of their position and took the profits for themselves. When the owner of the vineyard sent representatives to investigate, the tenants treated them badly, stoning one of them, beating another and even killing one. Finally, the landlord sent his son, reasoning that they would respect him. However, the wicked tenants killed him also. The parable ends with a rhetorical question: "When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?"

This parable had been told in a number of versions by many Rabbis in ancient Israel. And it was understood by those who heard it that the vineyard in question was none other than the holy nation of Israel. God had called Abraham and his descendants for a purpose, to be a blessing and means of salvation for all the peoples of the earth: "and by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves" (Genesis 12:3). They had not been called for their own benefit alone, but to be the means for the salvation of all. Similarly, the image of the vineyard was understood by Christians from the very beginning to be an image of the Church. And it was clear to the communities of first century believers that the son of the landlord was none other than Jesus Christ Himself, the Son of the Living God, Who gave His Life for the Life of the World and Who had sent the Grace of His Holy Spirit to dwell within and enliven the Church as the means of salvation for the entire world.

I have known quite a few Christians in my lifetime who see the Church as their own exclusive property, forgetting that the Church is the inheritor of the fulfillment of the ancient promises that God made to Abraham, to be a blessing, through which "all the families of the earth shall bless themselves." This parable reminds us that we are Orthodox Christians not only for our own salvation, but to be the means of the salvation of the entire world. Our actions, our prayers, our intent must go far beyond our own desire to be saved; indeed, we must pray and work for the salvation of all. How could any of us who are of Christ be satisfied if we alone are saved, while others around us are not?

Salvation is of course possible only through the saving Grace of God's own self-giving. But our goal as members of His Body is to work and to pray for all humanity to open their hearts to receive that Grace. Above all, we must let that Grace into our own hearts, so that we can grow into the kind of people described so beautifully by St. Isaac of Nineveh, people who have hearts that care for every person, every creature, even those who do evil, beseeching our Lord on their behalf for them to come to repentance and to be saved. Can any of us who are of Christ be satisfied or fulfilled or at peace if there is even one soul that is not saved?

Brothers and Sisters: This parable is a reminder that it is God's will for all to be saved, and that our task as tenants of His Vineyard is to pray, to love and work with all our hearts, with all our strength, for the salvation of every person created in the beauty of His own image. Let us alter the substance of our prayers so that we pray with as much fervor for others and their salvation as we pray for ourselves!

Fr. Elias

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