

“Father you have got to help!” said the tearful man at the door. “There is a family that I know very well that is in desperate need of money. The father is laid off due to pandemic. He has hardly anything left to feed his five kids. The worst part is, that they are about to be kicked out of the house for not paying the rent and on the streets without a roof over their heads!” The man concluded with one last heart-breaking sob.

“Well,” said the priest, “that really is a sad story. Why don’t you come inside and we’ll talk about it a little more.”

“So how much money is needed exactly?” asked the priest when they were both seated.

“Oh it’s really terrible Father”, said the man, “just for the rent \$3000 is needed by tomorrow otherwise they’ll be kicked out onto the streets.”

“I think, I can help the family with our charity fund. But I am just curious, how do you know so much about this family?” the priest asked.

“Well,” said the man sobbing once more “they are my tenants.”

This is one example of the relationship between a landlord and tenants. Today's Gospel reading gives another example of the landlord and tenants not of the homes but of the vineyards. In fact, if you have noticed, during the past three Sundays Gospel readings have focused on vineyard and workers. During 25<sup>th</sup> Sunday we heard about the landowner hiring workers at different time of the day to work in his vineyard. Last Sunday, we heard two sons are sent to work in the vineyard with different responses. This Sunday we focus again on the theme of working in the vineyard and producing good fruits.

The imagery of the people of God as a vineyard is common in both the Old and New Testaments. Generally, the vineyard stands for the nation of Israel as a whole but that does not exclude an emphasis on the role of the individual.

The vineyard parables all have certain things in common. God is the one who plants the vineyard. He chooses the best and most fertile land, works the land to prepare it, and then looks for a harvest, only to be disappointed for one reason or another.

In the first reading, from the book of Isaiah is called *'the Song of the Vineyard'* God is disappointed because, instead of producing good grapes, the vineyard produced wild, or, as some translations say, rotten grapes. So, what to do? There is nothing left to do but tear it all down. Isaiah’s message to the nation is that this is what God plans to do with Israel because the nation has produced rotten grapes.

In today's Gospel we have the parable of the vineyard and see how God is again disappointed with the vineyard.

The parable reflects the frictions in tenant- landlord relations in Palestine. During the time of Jesus, most of the lands including vineyards were owned by rich landlords who did not live in the countryside farms but lived in big cities like, Jerusalem, Damascus or Rome who leased their lands to tenants and were interested only in collecting produce.

In the Gospel parable, the history of Israel as God's vineyard is told. The owner of the vineyard sends one servant after another to get the part of the harvest as rent. However, the tenants choose not to pay and abuse the servants. The servants in the parable are God's prophets whom he regularly sent to Israel, only to see them abused and killed. Finally, the owner sends his son but he, too, is killed.

Hence God decides to put them to a miserable death and handover the vineyard to new tenants, others who will not disappoint him in producing good fruits.

We are the new tenants as mentioned in the Gospel who are supposed to give proper returns to the Landlord, the God. The landlord, God expects us to work in the vineyard and produced proper fruits – lasting fruits.

God has graciously provided us with many blessings - homes to live in and people who love, he has given us the opportunity for education, the professions we work in, the clothes on our backs and the shoes on our feet. That car that brought us to church today came from him, as does each and every good thing that we enjoy.

Truly we live in a rich and well provided vineyard. We live in a country where we can practice our faith freely. As in the scripture readings we heard today, God nourishes this vineyard with various sacraments of the church, especially the sacrament of the Eucharist. We should be so happy with all God has given us.

And what do we pay to live in this wonderful vineyard?

Since God has provided for us in such measure, are we not inspired to take a generous portion of all He has given and return it to Him? Or do we see ourselves in the story as those wicked tenants, who think the farm is theirs and keep all of the fruit for themselves?

Of course, each one's *personal vineyard* is completely unique and different. And each one is required to give produce to the landlord God according to his vineyard.

Let's ask ourselves. Are we producing "the fruits" that God expects of God's people – fruits of justice, equality, solidarity, compassion toward those who suffer, help to those who are needy forgiveness to those hurt us?