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HE WILL LET OUT THE VINEYARD TO OTHER TENANTS – Biblical Commentary by F. Alberto Maggi OSM

Mt 21.33-43

At that time Jesus said to High Priests and authorities, "Hear another parable. There was a master of a house who planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a winepress in it and built a tower and leased it to tenants, and went into another country. When the season for 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. Finally 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 threw 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 stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes'? Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits.

After having railed against the high priests and the elders and having announced that they, who thought they were the category nearest to the Lord ,were excluded from the kingdom, where they entered in fact into the category of the most impure, the most despised, the taxpayers and the prostitutes: Jesus starts again to attack the highest religious authority. It is that which we read in Matthew chapter 21,33-43.

Jesus speaks in an imperative way, without any respect or concern for these people and says: “«Hear...»” that is not an invitation , but a precise order. “«Hear another parable»”, and it is the third parable that has to do with the love of God for the vineyard. And Jesus recites a famous phrase of the prophet

Isaiah, the song of love of the Lord for his vineyard in chapter 5 where, after having told of the tenderness of the Lord, the care of the Lord for his vineyard , ends with a lament from the Lord.

One expects that grapes are produced, but in fact they are wild grapes, one expects justice but in fact “ here blood will flow”. So Jesus tells that “*«When the season for fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants to get his fruit»*”. And what did the tenants do? “*«And the tenants took his servants and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. »*”

Jesus sums up what the fate of the prophets will be. Addressed to the religious authorities this is a grave complaint: The religious authorities will never recognize the messenger of God, but they in fact oppose him and when possible , kill him. “*«Again he sent other servants, more than the first. And they did the same to them. »*”. At the end this master says: “ Send my only son”. In fact he sends his only son saying “*«They will respect my son.»*”, The word “son” appears three times to indicate the completion of this theme.

The master thinks they will have respect for the son, but does not know that these tenants, images of the religious authorities, demand respect for themselves, but they respect no one. Jesus in fact complains: “*«But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and have his inheritance. »*”. Jesus’ complaint is terrible. All those of the religious authority do only for their own gain, their own interests.

The God worshiped by them is not the Father of Jesus, but the God of the temple is money, the convenience, the interest; therefore they reason “ this is the heir, let’s kill him and take the inheritance”. All this they do for convenience. For the convenience – like the story of the prophet Isaiah- they are ready to say what is good is bad and what is bad is good. That which determines the actions of the religious authorities is never for the good for the people, but for their own good. Not what is right for the people, but what is right for their institution.

And in fact Jesus declares, “*« ...they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him »*”. It is what the book of Leviticus contains, in chapter 24, reserved for blasphemers. Jesus will be condemned as a blasphemer. The religious authorities should be the ones to tell the people of God’s will. When they encounter God, made man in Jesus, they condemn Him as a blasphemer. Actually they are the ones that blaspheme defacing the face of God.

So Jesus continues to speak with the High Priests and says: “*«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 »*”, literally “he will destroy them”, “*«and let out the vineyard to other tenants.. »*”. It is them themselves that emit their own sentence.

For they have killed for interest and the interest will kill them. They are devoured by money, the divinity that destroys all and they are the priests themselves that emit their own sentence. This time they have been wary to reply. And Jesus with profound irony – He is talking to the High Priests, to the elders of the people – says to them: “*«Have you never read in the Scriptures....»*”. Of course they have read the

scriptures but they have not understood them, the scriptures can only be understood when they are interpreted into the good of mankind.

Seeing that which interests the authority is the absolute good of their institution, their prestige, their power, they can read the scriptures, they can proclaim them, but they can never understand them. And Jesus with extreme irony says “ have you not read the scriptures?” Imagine, it is a psalm, 118, of course they have read it! But they read it without understanding why the veil of power prevents them from seeing the rule of interpretation of the scriptures: the love of God for his creatures, the only true absolute good.

Jesus recites psalm 118 where it says that “« *The stone that the builders rejected*»”, the engineers, the knowledgeable, “« *...has become the cornerstone; »*”, the fundamental part, the most important. And now here is Jesus’ sentence, after they themselves have emitted the sentence, “«*Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you....*»” Not only will the kingdom be taken away, but “«*...given to a people....* »”.

These pagans that they retain excluded from the kingdom of God, those pagans that should be overcome, the pagans that were marginalized, in fact it will be them welcomed into the kingdom of God while “«*producing its fruits.* »”. Then there is verse 44. Which is a doubtful verse, but is out of place. It should be after verse 42.

And the liturgical part unfortunately does not have a very eloquent ending. “ *When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus’ parables,...*” the Pharisees appear that were not there before because the evangelist wants to make understood that Jesus’ confrontation is with all the religious forces of Israel, “*...they knew he was talking about them.*” And they want to eliminate Him.

Jesus’ words do not arouse a desire to repent, but the elimination of those that exposed them. For the priests in power and the religious authority, there is no hope.