

LET OUT THE VINEYARD TO OTHER TENANTS

- Biblical Commentary by Father Alberto Maggi OSM

Matthew 21:33-43

*“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.*

God’s enemy is not sin; the sinner who welcomes the love of the Lord can convert. God’s enemy in the Gospels is called convenience. Convenience is refractory and hostile to divine action. This is what we read in the Matthew’s gospel, chapter 21,33-43.

After telling the highest religious authorities, high priests and elders that the categories they considered excluded from divine action, such as tax collectors and prostitutes, would have taken their place in the kingdom of God, Jesus addresses the highest authorities, high priests and elders saying *“Hear another parable.”* It is not an invitation but an order and it is the third time that Jesus has a vineyard as the subject. The vineyard was the image of the people of Israel according to the figure found in the book of the prophet Isaiah in chapter 5. And indeed a vineyard is the protagonist of this parable.

*“There was a master of a house who planted a Vineyard..”* and here for the evangelist with a series of actions shows the man’s great concern for this Vineyard *“...he put a fence around it and dug a winepress in it and built a tower..”* So indicating the man’s great concern for this Vineyard *“..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. ..”* The evangelist insists that the fruit belongs to this man.

*“And the tenants took his servants and beat one, killed another, and stoned another.”* It is the lot of the prophets. God continually sent prophets to his people and continually these prophets have been rejected, persecuted and often killed. Why? Prophets have always called for change, but those

who are in power do not wish for change, but want to maintain their privilege and their position of prestige

*“Again he sent other servants, more than the first. And they did the same to them. Finally he sent his son to them,..”* the expression indicates the only child. The only child is he who represents the father and who inherits everything, *“... saying, ‘They will respect my son.’* What an illusion! The religious authorities have respect only for themselves, they do not respect others because everything they do, as Jesus will now denounce, is based on their convenience and not on the good of others.

*“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 unmasks (the fact) that the true god of the temple is called interest and convenience. Jesus did not die because it was God's will, but he died for the interest of the priestly caste in power. Hence the calculation of what these tenants do, representing the religious authorities that was based only on their convenience. While Jesus for the good of men sacrificed his own convenience, the religious authorities for their own convenience sacrifice the good of men and do not even hesitate to murder the son of God.

*“And they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.”* Being *“thrown out”* means, according to the book of Leviticus in chapter 24,14, the sentence that was reserved for blasphemers. The highest religious authorities of the people consider Jesus, the son of God, an enemy of God, a blasphemer and as such must be eliminated.

*“When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?”* and the high priests and the elders, to which Jesus had told the parable *“.. 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.’* So they give their own sentence!

*“..and let out the vineyard to other tenants..”* in other words to the gentiles *“..who will give him the fruits in their seasons.”* And Jesus with profound irony, let us keep in mind that he is addressing pious people, the high priests and elders who know the scripture, as if the high priests were ignorant, says *“Have you never read in the Scripture?”* and then recites psalm 118, 22-23 *The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.”*

And here is Jesus' sentence *“ Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you..”* Jesus had already said that the categories considered by religion the furthest away were prostitutes and tax collectors have moved forward not in the sense of preceding, but of taking their place; now Jesus he says it clearly *the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people..* “ the gentiles *“.. producing its fruits.”*

It is a shame that in the liturgical version verse 45 has been removed, where the significance is explained, to whom this parable was addressed. *“When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they perceived that he was speaking about them. And although they were seeking to arrest him, they feared the crowds, because they held him to be a prophet.”* Jesus' words do not arouse a desire for repentance, the authorities never repent, but only the elimination of those who unmasked them.

