

The readings we have today read like an allegory, a story whose meaning is hidden but that calls for recognition at the end. I'd like us to look at that together for I believe that its message is very topical for us today.

To begin I'd like you to pick up your Parish Bulletin and look at the first reading, which really is a poem or a song, and to imagine a guitar player on stage, getting ready to sing a ballad. As she is plucking away at the strings she starts to sing about her friend and the love he has for his vineyard. Listening to the words you can almost see him picking up clods of dirt to smell the earth, clearing the stones away, selecting and trimming the vines, and preparing the press that would allow the grapes to yield its juice, dreaming of the wine that would result.

The second verse then morphs into a lament, and the singer doesn't even get through the whole verse before her friend appears on the stage to sing about his heartbreak, for all he found on the vines were sour grapes. The disappointment has left him without energy to start again, as he weeps; "Let it fall into ruin. I can't care anymore, I could not have cared anymore."

The spotlight then fades, and a chorus appears with every member looking straight at the audience, singing the final lines: "The vineyard of the Lord is the House of Israel, the men of Judah that chosen plant. He expected justice but found bloodshed, integrity, but only a cry of distress."

In today's Gospel then, Jesus takes up the allegory, but instead of focussing on the grapes he introduces tenants, sharefarmers, who have contracted to work the vineyard for a share of the vintage. Their efforts are bringing good results, but they are unwilling to give the owner his due. They thrash, stone and kill the servants he has sent them to collect his share of the vintage, even going so far as to kill the owner's son.

Jesus, then, looks directly into the faces of those who had been entrusted with the care of God's people and asks: "Now what will the owner do when he comes to face those tenants?"

We know the answer they gave, - that the owner would come and bring those wretches to a wretched end, and lease the vineyard to other tenants who would deliver the produce to him at the end of the season. But they refused to take any notice of their own assessment, and went on to kill the one who was sent to correct them, and thereby lost their birthright.

Today that allegory is addressed to us, where it is no longer the grapes or the tenants who are the focus of attention, but ourselves as partners with God in tending the earth and the social fabric that makes up our human society.

Pope Francis, in his Encyclical, 'Laudato si', on the state of the environment, has called our attention to what we are doing to the earth with our exploitation of its resources, the abuse of its riches, the mismanagement of its products and the defilement of the very elements we need to stay alive. Tied in with that is the lack of care we have for each other, especially of the poorest, the most weak, the off-beat, the handicapped and the unskilled.

In our partnership with God we've been entrusted with a responsibility that touches every aspect of life and society, including the protection of life itself from its beginning to its end, yet, when it comes to decision-making, is it the right thing to do that gets a hearing, or what we find most convenient?

The gospel with which we will finish our readings for this Liturgical year is that of the Last Judgement, which, in turn, is a powerful statement about the importance which God attaches to you and me playing our part in the partnership into which he has called us. On that final day of days, we are told, He will look back over our lives, and he will judge us on our partnership performance. When he does that, let's hope that we will hear him compliment us on being responsible, productive and generous partners, - that we will hear something along the lines of: "I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was in a nursing home and you came to visit me, lonely and you made time for me, in a wheelchair and you helped me get around: come and take the place prepared for you before the foundation of the world."

Will we be able to meet his eyes with that confidence?