

## More than a Prophet

The gospel for this coming Sunday (Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost) is Matthew 21:33-46. This text is the Parable of the Tenants.

This is the second of three parables spoken by Jesus shortly after his triumphal entry into Jerusalem (cf. last week's Gospel, 21:23-27 [28-32]; and next week's, 22:1-14). All three parables are spoken, in succession, after the chief priests and elders of the people had questioned Jesus' authority (21:23). By this late point in Jesus' ministry, the division between him and the leaders of the Jewish people is sharply drawn. Our Lord's imminent death, resurrection, and sending of the Spirit at Pentecost ("When . . . the owner of the vineyard comes," v 40) are important for understanding Jesus' words to the Jewish leaders.

Jesus begins by describing a vineyard that is totally equipped, a place in which workers would enjoy working. God's old covenant kingdom was likewise very well endowed. However, the workers entrusted to produce fruit refuse to acknowledge their responsibility to God, their proprietor. They mishandle the servants (prophets) sent to collect the rightful portion owed the owner. Finally, to cap it off, they kill the s(S)on of the owner. Jesus heightens the dramatic tension at this point in the story by turning to his audience and asking, "What would you do to tenants who acted that way?" Their twofold answer is: "Punish the perpetrators and rent the vineyard to truly productive workers!" When that second idea is mentioned, namely to open the Kingdom to Gentiles, the hearers in the parallel account (Lk 20:16) explode with emotion: "May this never be!"

The fruits which the Householder expects and which He has a right to count upon are the fruits meet for repentance, holiness, and righteousness. The servants who came to receive the fruits are the prophets from Moses to John the Baptist.

The Gospel is that by his sheer grace, the Lord has established a vineyard (i.e., his kingdom) and wonderfully supplied it with gifts that will enable an abundant harvest. Though the tenants of God's vineyard/kingdom rebel against him, in love God sends his own Son to restore his vineyard and its tenants. And though the tenants reject and kill the master's own Son, the Lord raises up his Son and makes him the chief cornerstone. By God's grace, the Lord has placed *us* in his vineyard/kingdom today. And he continues to send his Son to us and to our listeners through the ministry of his Holy Christian Church.

Jesus was indeed a prophet, but also much more. Thus this parable (vv 33-46), as well as the following one (22:1-14), identifies Him as God's Son. (TLSB)

Prayer: Heavenly Father, keep us united by faith to Christ, our source of life, lest we ever turn away, reject Him, and so lose our hope of salvation. Amen. (TLSB)