

We again hear another parable from Jesus

His parables were meant for those listening to him

So he spoke of things they knew

Many of them involved fishing, vineyards and parenthood

Things we can still relate to as well

Because we still fish

We grow crops

And all of us have parents

Most are parents

Today's parable of the vineyard has many aspects

It speaks to the ancient Israelite community

The wild grapes are those that rejected Jesus Christ

Those that rejected their covenant with God

Tearing up the vineyard and planting new plants

That is offering the kingdom to the gentiles

But it also speaks to our own hearts

How when we sin

We are rejecting God

We become those wild grapes

And how when we enter into a conversion

The vineyard of our hearts are torn up

Plowed under

New plants are the virtues we cultivate

Turning back to our heavenly Father

These things are part of the human condition

They have been with us from the beginning

God knows this

And He chooses to continue to call us

To invite us into a conversion

To create natural hearts in us

And to remove our stony hearts

In our reading from Isaiah, the people of God are on trial

And they are found wanting

They have been given everything

They are God's beloved

Yet they chose to turn from His covenant

He had chosen a fertile hillside

Israel was the Chosen People

The choicest vine

The Lord did all he could in the vineyard

He cultivated the ground, cleared it of stones

He kept watch over it

He gave the Promised Land to His people

He fought for them

Giving the richest land for his people

But the quality of the harvest was wild grapes

So sour you could not even eat the grapes

Much less make a quality wine

They knew all of this

And they rejected his covenant

And so Isaiah foretells what will happen to the House of Israel

They will become a ruin

Overrun and trampled down

Because they rejected God's covenant

God remains faithful

But sometimes we are not very good being friends of God

St Paul gives us a lesson being friends of God

He knew what it was to be opposed to Him

When he persecuted the early Church

But Paul heard the voice of the Lord

He accepted it and entered into his conversion

A conversion he would enter into and live for the rest of his life

He tells us whatever is true and honorable

Whatever is just and pure

Whatever is lovely and gracious

Any excellence and worthy of praise

Think about these things

And continue doing what we learn from him

Imitating Christ

So his peace will guard our minds and hearts

These things will keep anxiety from ruling over us

We may still have pain and suffering, as Paul did

We may be rejected, as Paul was

He was shipwrecked, put in prison and beaten

But none of this caused anxiety

Because he was centered on Christ

The same yesterday, today and forever

Paul shows us what it is to be a friend of God

Jesus' followers would have known Isaiah very well

So he gives this old parable a new perspective

This parable was given at a specific time and place

He was speaking to them during Holy Week

After his triumphant entrance into Jerusalem

He had been facing great opposition from the religious leaders

We know that the worst was yet to come

But the people were supporting him

The vines that are planted are our souls

We are his vineyard

The hedges that surround his vineyard are his laws

The commandments, the precepts of the Church

The protection of the angels

We are attached to each other through love

Like many vines growing together

The roots of the plants intertwined in the soil

The shoots of the vines attaching us to our neighbors

At times helping others to grow

At times allowing us to rest when we need it

Then he went on a journey

This journey is God's patience with us

At harvest time he sent servants to obtain his harvest

They are beaten, stoned and killed

These are our sins

This is what our sins do to the heart of God

But in our pride, we do not see reality

Finally, he sends his son

And they think, if we kill the heir

We will inherit the land

Sin had blinded them and affected their right judgment

The kingdom is promised to the meek and lowly

Not the powerful and haughty

To inherit the kingdom,

We are called to give up home, family and property

These tenants extort the home, family and property of the landowner

The son was not sent to punish the tenants

But they saw it this way

Because that is what they would have done

The landowner sends his son as an offer of repentance

To call them to conversion

So he asks: *what will the landowner do?*

They respond:

He will put those men to a wretched death

And lease his vineyard to others

Remember, he is speaking to religious leaders after Palm Sunday

With this response they pass judgment on themselves

The vineyard is here for each of us

Planted at our baptism

We cultivate it through our actions

Not in words alone

But how well we live the commandments

What is the practice of my faith like?

Is it only when convenient?

Why is this church packed on Christmas, Easter and Ash Wednesday?

There is something many people recognize in their hearts

How do we cultivate that when we speak with them?

That is what it means to say our vines are interconnected

Not only with those that practice their faith in a regular way

But also with those that need our support

The kingdoms, empires and nations of the world rise and fall

When we study why

Rarely do they fall from the outside

They may be attacked

They may suffer some defeats in battles

But the ultimate cause of almost every worldly power was from within

Nations and peoples turning from God's law, from His covenant

God's vineyard will last

And we will not be driven out

If we are judged not worthy

It will be from within

Now is the time for each of us to listen to the invitation in our heart

Honoring God

Respecting His law

Respecting marriage between one man and one woman

Respecting marital fidelity

Learning about and practicing NFP

Putting aside contraceptives and the culture of death

Protecting all human life

Especially the unborn and the elderly

Caring for the poor

Following St Paul

Renouncing anxiety

And placing God in the center of everything we have and everything we are

So His peace that surpasses all human understanding

Will fill our hearts and minds

And we can truly become friends with our best friend