

Meditations: Friday of the Second Week of Lent

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during this season of Lent.

- The vineyard, an image of Israel
- Failures are opportunities for salvation
- Our fruit is for God's glory

A MAN 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 (Mt 21:33). After some time goes by, he sends his servants to look for the fruit that belongs to him.

Surprisingly, the vinedressers mistreat and even kill some of them. So the owner of the vineyard decides to send his own son, thinking that *they will respect my son (Mt 21:37)*. But the tenants reacted very differently. They think that by killing the heir they can appropriate his inheritance for themselves. And so *they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him*.

In this parable, Jesus is describing the history of Israel who, as Saint John Chrysostom said, repeatedly stained its hands with the blood of the prophets sent by God.^[1] The vineyard is an image of God's continuous effort to help his people bear fruit, as well as of their repeated rejection, especially by the leaders of the people. The chief priests and the Pharisees who were present immediately understood *that he was speaking about them (Mt 21:45)*. Their reaction to Jesus' words

is similar to that of the vinedressers in the parable, but their fear of the people restrains them from acting: *although they were seeking to arrest him, they feared the crowds, because they held him to be a prophet.*

Nevertheless, “God’s disappointment at the wicked behavior of mankind is not the last word! This is the great novelty of Christianity: a God who, even though disappointed by our mistakes and our sins, does not fail to keep his Word, does not give up and, most of all, does not seek vengeance! The urgency of replying with good fruits to the call of the Lord, who asks us to become his vineyard, helps us understand what is new and original about the Christian faith”^[2]

TO EXPLAIN the meaning of this parable, Jesus cites Psalm 117: *The*

stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes (Ps 117:22-23). This is the Paschal psalm *par excellence*, and is sung or prayed during the Easter Vigil liturgy. The death of the son, seemingly incomprehensible, becomes the path to the Resurrection. In the divine plans, failures are also opportunities for salvation and life.

The Old Testament story of Joseph, for example, is also the story of rejection and mistreatment. Although his brothers do not kill Joseph, he is betrayed and sold to some merchants for twenty pieces of silver. These circumstances lead to Joseph's arrival in Egypt, where he becomes an important figure, and helps the sons of Jacob to survive the famine. In this narrative, the infidelity of Israel stands out. But, above all, it is God's "style" of

drawing good out of evil that is stressed. What seemed like senseless evil ended up being the key to Israel's salvation.

We see the same thing in the person of Jesus. Men betray the divine plan, but God seeks a new solution to save us. He always seeks in our falls the way to help us get up again. "Our Father God, when we come to him repentant, draws, from our wretchedness, treasure; from our weakness, strength. What then will he prepare for us, if we don't forsake him, if we go to him daily, if we talk lovingly to him and confirm our love with deeds, if we go to him for everything, trusting in his almighty power and mercy?"^[3]

THE PARABLE is similar to the song of the unfruitful vineyard by the

prophet Isaiah (cf. *Is* 5:1-7). The vineyard that had been cared for with such great love did not bear the expected fruit: *He looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes*. Instead of savory grapes, its branches produced a bitter fruit. Then God asks himself: *What more was there to do for my vineyard, that I have not done in it?* A Father of the Church comments: “What an ungrateful people! The ones who were to give their master sweet fruits, pierced him with sharp thorns. Take care, therefore, that your vineyard does not produce thorns instead of grape clusters, that your grape harvest does not yield vinegar instead of wine.”^[4]

God expects fruits from us, but not because He needs them, but because his glory is that we be happy. The most savory fruit for Him is, without doubt, our love. Certainly, we too have often been like the vineyard in

the prophet's song or like the vinedressers in the parable. "If each of us makes an examination of conscience, we will see how often we have 'thrown out the prophets,' how often we have told Jesus: 'Go away,' how we have sought to save ourselves, how often we have thought that we were the just ones."^[5] —

Saint Josemaría wrote in one of his Letters: "Let me insist: be faithful. It is something that I have deep in my heart. If you are faithful, our service to souls and to the Holy Church will be filled with abundant fruit."^[6] — We can turn to Mary, who is such a fruitful mother because she was docile to the Spirit of the Lord. She will help us to always find new ways to bear fruit.

^[1] — Cf. Saint John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of Saint Matthew*, 68, 1-2.

[2] Francis, Angelus, 8 October 2017.

[3] Saint Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 309.

[4] Saint Maximus of Turin, Sermon for the Feast of Saint Cyprian.

[5] Francis, Homily, 1 June 2015.

[6] Saint Josemaría, *Letters 2*, no. 46.

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