

Meditations: Sunday of the Twenty- Seventh Week of Ordinary Time (Year A)

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during the twenty-seventh week of Ordinary Time. The topics are: a vine that does not bear fruit; the memory of the vine-dresser's care; Christ in the vineyard.

- A vine that does not bear fruit
- The memory of the vine-dresser's care
- Christ in the vineyard

THE PROPHET Isaiah once sang a song describing the care a friend bestowed upon his vineyard (cf. *Is* 5:1-7). Located in fertile land, the owner went to great lengths to ensure a successful harvest: he cleared the land of stones, enclosed it, dug a trench, and built a tower to watch over his vineyard day and night. Finally, he took the trouble to dig a winepress to tread the freshly harvested grapes. After all these efforts, we can well understand the disappointment of the vineyard owner when, instead of finding the delicious grapes he expected, he discovered that it yielded bitter, unpleasant-tasting fruit. *What more was there to do for my vineyard that I have not done in it?*, he asks (*Is* 5:4). The problem was not the land, the vine, the farmer, or external conditions: the vine alone was responsible.

Traditionally, this vineyard has been seen as an image of the house of Israel, which failed to produce the fruits the Lord expected despite his care. However, each one of us can also be represented here when we are not aware of the graces God gives us. Contrition leads us to discover the attention the Lord lavishes on us and the pain our sins cause Him. It is not a sense of wounded pride, either. Rather, "one cries because one does not match the Lord who loves us so much, and the thought of the good not done makes one sad. This is the sense of the sin. These people say: 'I have hurt the one I love.'"^[1]

When these tears are born of love, they help us begin again with new joy. "If sometimes you get mad," St. Josemaria advised, "because you are not as you should be and, alone — without making a scene — you shed big burning tears, remember these verses, that perhaps are pretty bad,

but console me: ‘My life consists in loving / And, if with loving I’m familiar, / ‘Tis because I’ve sorrowed much; / For there’s no finer lover, / Than he who’s wept much.’ You and I have to weep much alone, in the presence of God, because we are not as we would like to be for God’s love...”^[2] —

THIS SUNDAY’S psalm asks that God’s memory of how He has cared for his vineyard does not lead Him to reject it, but instead to care for it even more, to restore it, and to remove its enemies: *Thou didst bring a vine out of Egypt; thou didst drive out the nations and plant it. Thou didst clear the ground for it; it took deep root and filled the land. [...] It sent out its branches to the sea, and its shoots to the River. [...] Turn again, O God of hosts! Look down from heaven, and*

see; have regard for this vine, the stock which thy right hand planted (Ps 80:8-15).

Sometimes, we may imagine God in a human way, with limited patience.

We are sure He loves us, but we believe that if we do not respond, sooner or later, He will become discouraged and stop giving us the care we need. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Lord "never tires of forgiving, but we sometimes tire of asking for forgiveness."^[3] A vinedresser tends to his land not because it deserves it, but because it needs his care.

Similarly, God's mercy is not poured out on those who have earned it, but on those who need it the most.

The founder of Opus Dei wrote: "If ever you feel crestfallen on seeing your own wretchedness, (perhaps in a particularly vivid way), that is the moment to abandon yourself

completely and docilely in God's hands."^[4] Then, like the psalmist, we can remember all the care we have received from God before. In prayer, it is good to go back to the times when we have felt his closeness especially and experienced the happiness of being with Him. In this way, we will develop the conviction that *he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ (Phil 1:6)*.

IN THE Gospel, Jesus speaks of another vineyard, the owner of which cared for it assiduously, like Isaiah's vineyard. However, this time it could not help but yield fruit (cf. *Mt 21:33-34, 43*). If the first vineyard was the house of Israel, the restored one is the new Israel, the Church, the body of Christ inseparable from its Head. Jesus is the new branch

planted in his Father's vineyard, the cornerstone that guarantees God will never reject his vineyard (cf. *Mt* 21:42). And we know that we will always bear fruit if we remain united to Him (cf. *Jn* 15:1-8).

The Lord's vineyard is not in a greenhouse: it is planted in the middle of the world and it is not exempt from difficulties. Specifically, Jesus describes how those entrusted with its care decided to take possession of it, which would ultimately provoke the owner's wrath: *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* (Matthew 21:41). Those men had forgotten that the vineyard was not theirs but the owner's. He was the one who had planted it and prepared everything needed for it to bear fruit.

God has entrusted us with a portion of his vineyard too. There are people around us we can help bear fruit through our prayer, affection, and example. The best thing we can do for them is to help them fall in love with Jesus and make Him the cornerstone of their lives. “It is Christ we must talk about, not ourselves,” St. Josemaria taught.^[5] Another time he added, “To be with Christ is to find security. Being able to look at yourself in Christ enables you to be better every day. To get to know Christ necessarily leads you to love him. And to love Christ is to assure your happiness.”^[6] In this new vineyard of the Lord, we have an expert vinedresser, the Virgin Mary. We can ask her to sustain us in the hope of bearing abundant fruit, remaining united to her Son through love, sure that He never abandons us.

[1] Pope Francis, Audience, February 12, 2020.

[2] St. Josemaría Escrivá, Get together 4-III-1975, quoted in *The Way*, Critical-historical edition, commentary on number 436.

[3] Pope Francis, Angelus, 17-III-2013.

[4] St. Josemaría Escrivá, Letter 2, no. 25.

[5] St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 163.

[6] St. Josemaría Escrivá, *In Dialogue with the Lord*, no. 35.