

Meditations: Monday of the Ninth Week of Ordinary Time

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during the ninth week of Ordinary Time.

- The parable of the vinedressers
- The power of service
- God continues to trust us

SHORTLY AFTER his entrance into Jerusalem on a donkey, Jesus tells the story of a man who entrusted his vineyard to tenants and went away. At harvest time, the owner sent

servants to collect the produce due him, but the vinedressers attacked some of the servants and killed others. The owner assessed the situation and, as a last resort, decided to send his son, who he thought the tenants would respect. *But those tenants said to one another, “This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.” So they seized him and killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard (Mk 12:7-8).*

Jesus tells his own story in this parable. He wants to anticipate the choice his listeners will have to make in a few days: will they recognize Him as the true heir and king, or not? The scribes and Pharisees bombard Jesus with questions immediately after the parable, trying to find out whether He is the Messiah. Although, many years later, we have no doubt that Jesus' words referred to Himself, we can still ask

ourselves the most important question: what is Christ's relevance in my life? Is He the Messiah who saves me from idolatry or do I, even unconsciously, have other priorities with which I too throw Him *out of the vineyard*?

"If someone asks us the question, 'Who is Jesus Christ?', we should say what we have learned: He is the Saviour of the world, the Son of the Father, which we recite in the Creed. [...] It is a little more difficult to answer the question of who Jesus Christ is 'for me.'"^[1]

PERHAPS THE vinedressers' greatest mistake was claiming the land as their own. They wanted to possess what the owner had entrusted to their care. In their minds, there was no room for working for someone

else: they wanted dominion and total autonomy over what they were growing. They were ready to resort to violence to achieve their ambition.

At first their strategy seems successful, but Jesus makes the end awaiting them clear: *What [then] will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come, put the tenants to death, and give the vineyard to others (Mk 12:9).* The vinedresser will not only fail to control the vineyard; they will lose something much more important, which they hoped to enjoy through their theft: they will lose their very lives. In a spiritual sense, their decision expresses where the poisoned desire to remain outside of Jesus' household leads. It deprives us of the fruitfulness that comes from union with him. *I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing. Anyone who does not remain*

in me will be thrown out like a branch and wither; people will gather them and throw them into a fire and they will be burned (Jn 15:5-6).

"If we let Christ reign in our soul," St. Josemaria said, "we will not become authoritarian. Rather we will serve everyone. How I like that word: service! To serve my king and, through him, all those who have been redeemed by his blood. I really wish we Christians knew how to serve..."^[2] Service is not the renunciation of all our interests. If we discover the true power of service, we will realise that God wants us to enjoy his vineyard.

JESUS SAYS that the owner will *give the vineyard to others* (Mk 12:9) after getting rid of the tenants. Given what the owner has suffered, it might be

more sensible to wait a while, take over the management of the vineyard himself, or entrust it to family members or close friends. Nonetheless, he is confident that someone else will be able to take good care of his vineyard. The vinedressers' betrayal does not make him lose hope.

Jesus shows us that God acts in a similar way. Sometimes we make poor decisions about the vineyard He has given us, but He renews his trust in us all the same. We might be unstable in our desires and actions, but He is always faithful. He waits for us every day, come what may: his love does not falter. The Church's history is full of saints who, at first, bore some resemblance to the vinedressers. St. Paul, for instance, zealously persecuted the first Christians. When he realized that Jesus was the true owner of the vineyard, however, he became one of

the most fruitful apostles: he chose to labour in Jesus' vineyard.

Knowing that God trusts us makes us strong in hope. When we sense that sin is trying to take control of the vineyard, we can take refuge in God's faithfulness. He always keeps his promise of infinite love: "We do not rely only on our own poor strength, but on God's strength and power."^[3] — The Virgin Mary will help us unite our efforts to the great project of serving her Son in the vineyard to which He has called us.

^[1] Pope Francis, Homily, 25-X-2018.

^[2] St. Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 182.

^[3] Bishop Javier Echevarría, Pastoral letter, 28-XI-1995, no. 11.

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