

5. March 2021

“Jesus is the cornerstone”

Mt 21:33-43, 45-46

'Listen to another parable. There was a man, a landowner, who planted a vineyard; he fenced it round, dug a winepress in it and built a tower; then he leased it to tenants and went abroad. When vintage time drew near he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his produce. But the tenants seized his servants, thrashed one, killed another and stoned a third. Next he sent some more servants, this time a larger number, and they dealt with them in the same way. Finally he sent his son to them thinking, "They will respect my son." But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, "This is the heir. Come on, let us kill him and take over his inheritance." So they seized him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?' They answered, 'He will bring those wretches to a wretched end and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will deliver the produce to him at the proper time.' Jesus said to them, 'Have you never read in the scriptures: The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this is the Lord's doing and we marvel at it? 'I tell you, then, that the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit.' When they heard his parables, the chief priests and the scribes realised he was speaking about them, but though they would have liked to arrest him they were afraid of the crowds, who looked on him as a prophet.

Jesus speaks very clearly here about those who threaten his life. Even though he does not address them directly in this parable, the chief priests and the scribes know that they are meant! What a tragedy!

What God had prepared for Israel! He had chosen it to be a fruitful vineyard and had shown his love in so many ways, and the chief priests and Pharisees in particular would have shone like the sun for the other people! But the parable clearly shows what happened.

The prophets God sent called Israel to repentance again and again, reminding them of God's benefits and naming Israel's unfaithfulness. In every situation and no matter how messed up, the way of repentance was open for them.

We have sometimes pondered why wickedness could spread in such a way. It must have been a matter of deeply closed hearts in the case of the Lord's enemies who sought his life, as Jesus made clear in the parable, and then proved in the reaction of the scribes and the chief priests.

They must have experienced the Lord as a threat, as someone who wanted to rob them of their religious privileges.

Perhaps we have already hit the middle with this aspect. Religious privilege claimed for oneself is a horrendous contradiction. It is an appropriation of a gift from God, which one receives for other people but takes advantage of for oneself. If this happens, then pride unfolds ever more strongly through this presumption. Pride, however, closes the heart to a great extent and builds a wall around the heart. The continuation of presumption, especially in the religious sphere, gives Satan more and more influence. This can increase to the point of hatred.

So today's text clearly shows where this can lead.

The tenants in the parable had completely repressed the fact that the vineyard did not belong to them at all! Even with the owner's servants they acted according to their evil will. And when the owner sent his son as the last one, they were no longer able to restrain their wickedness. Did they even want to or could they still recognise their wickedness? The heart was darkened and they probably regarded the son as an intruder in their sphere, which they had taken possession of for themselves. It may even come to such a point that in their pride they regard it as a kind of injustice which was done to them with the coming of the son. What a perversion!

But the Lord - to transfer the parable - has made this Son the cornerstone. With him the house of God stands and falls. So it is and will remain until the end of time: Do I welcome the Son of God when he comes into his own? Do I open my heart to him or do I leave him on the outside, because the world is his property. It was created through him (*cf. Col 1:15-16*). We, on the other hand, are entrusted with life as a gift from God!

Today we like to talk about the responsibility for creation and that we should preserve it for future generations, about climate protection and how much we are in danger of destroying our environment through exploitation and irrationality. There is no doubt that some of this is true.

But isn't the moral destruction of human beings and their relationship to God and to each other incomparably more important? Wouldn't it be much more urgent to take responsibility in this relationship and to have our hearts purified so that wickedness does not take over?

Everyone should take responsibility for his life, which is entrusted to him by God and which God will judge. The false egoistic appropriation of our lives, disposing of things that are only entrusted to us, makes our hearts dark like the heart of the vinedressers in the parable. The most essential thing we can do is certainly to focus our attention on this and to work on the heart in the spirit of God so that it is freed from its deceitfulness and becomes capable of truly loving. It will be fruitful both for us and for the Kingdom of God. The awareness of living our lives as a gift and in responsibility before God helps us to grasp more deeply the dignity of our existence.