

18. March 2022

Gifts and vocation are irrevocable

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.

We all understand that in this parable the Lord is talking about Himself. But why does He choose the method of parables to make Himself understood?

On the one hand, we may suppose that this way of speaking allowed the hearers to "save face", so to speak; although in the course of the narrative it became increasingly clear that he was referring to them, as we read at the end of today's Gospel.

In Asia, for example, it is customary to tell things through stories, because it is very important for people there not to "lose face", i.e. reputation and honour, especially in the public sphere.

The advantage of this form of communication is that the listener does not feel directly accused and exposed, and therefore does not have to react immediately by protecting himself, but can understand the comparison indirectly and then apply it to himself.

Another advantage is that such a story allows the listener to draw objective conclusions without immediately implicating himself. Thus, he can form a more objective judgement.

In any case, the Lord must have had his wise motives in opting for parables, to make it clear to the religious authorities that what they were about to do was exactly what their fathers had done with the prophets. Before telling them the parable we hear today, the Lord had made them see through another comparison that the tax collectors and prostitutes had believed in John the Baptist, while they did not repent or believe in him (Mt 21:28-32).

When we see the ways and methods Jesus used to speak, we too are invited to ask the Holy Spirit again and again to show us, in different circumstances, what is the best way to say things, even if they are difficult questions; or what are the most appropriate words according to the situation.

At the end of the parable, the Lord makes a very important statement: *"the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit"*.

Does this mean that the People of Israel were cast off by God, as unfortunately often is was misinterpreted in Christendom? This erroneous interpretation would be contrary to a statement made by St. Paul in the Letter to the Romans: *"There is no change of mind on God's part about the gifts he has made or of his choice"* (Rom 11:29).

What is certain is that until today, Israel as a whole people has not believed in its Messiah and has been obstinate in its unbelief. However, this obstinacy will not last forever, because St. Paul assures us: *"Part of Israel had its mind hardened, but only until the gentiles have wholly come in; and this is how all Israel will be saved."* (Rom 11:25-26)

So we can pray and give the Jews a good testimony of the love that God has manifested in his Son, because the great event of Israel coming to faith is yet to come.

The children of Israel have gone through a long and very painful way, through the centuries, without the comforting certainty that the God of their fathers has already sent his own Son for the redemption of the world (cf. Jn 3:16).

God has mercy on his people and wants to cleanse them from all their sins with the blood of his Son and to heal them from all their errors. This applies to Israel and also to all the peoples of the earth.

The blindness of the leaders of the people at the time of Jesus cast a shadow over all Israel. Instead of making it easier for the people to recognise the Messiah, they made it more difficult for them.

In the meantime, the people of Israel once again have a land. May they also return to their home in the Heart of the Father, that Heart which He opened for all mankind through His Son! May the Lord remove the veil from their eyes, so that they may be able to recognise the glory of the Messiah of all peoples! Then the shadow will vanish, and we can expect a tremendous grace to come upon them as Israel awakens to the fullness of life.