

Sermon—13th Sunday of Matthew
St George Orthodox Church—Albany, NY
Fr John Vazquez
9.3.23

MATTHEW 21.33-42

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit—one God—Amen!
 Christ is in our midst!

I want to read something for you and tell me if it sounds familiar...

There was a vineyard for My Beloved, a place in power and richness. He placed a wall around it and fortified it. He planted it with choicest vine. He built a tower in its midst and also made a winepress in it. So I waited for it to bring forth grapes, but it produced thorn plants. And now, man of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, judge between Me and My vineyard. What shall I yet do of My vineyard that I have not done for it? For I waited for it to bring forth grapes, but it produced thorn-plants. But now I will tell you what I shall do to my vineyard: I shall remove its wall and it shall be for booty. I shall break down its wall and it shall be trampled underfoot. I will forsake my vineyard. It shall not be pruned or cultivated but thorns shall sprout forth as in a barren land. I will also command the clouds not to rain on it. For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the man of Judah is His beloved plant. I waited for it to bring forth judgement, but it brought forth lawlessness, and not righteousness but a cry. Is 5. 1-7

This is from the prophet Isaiah and the pharisees to whom our Lord tells this parable today would have known this and they are convicted by this

But it is not just the pharisees that the Lord says this parable to today. It is to us.

When Jesus says that the master in the Parable—his Father—will send His Son, that is in answer to what the Lord says through Isaiah. *What shall I yet do for it that I have not done for it?*

Here stands the Son of God in front of us today—saying have you not read the scriptures? Do you not see what I have given you and what I am doing for you? Everything you have is from me and there will come a time when I ask you to answer for what I have given you.

There is a story about when David was in the wilderness with his men (1Sam/1Kings 25) and there is a man named Nabal who has many possessions—flocks and herds—and David and his men protect the possessions of Nabal so that no thief or raider can steal in and take anything. But you see, Nabal cannot see David, he is in the wilderness. Nabal does not go out into the wilderness. Well, there comes a time when David goes to Nabal to ask for some provisions for his men and Nabal says, “NO!” David is angry and he goes to get his men to take Nabal’s possessions by force. Nabal, is ungrateful, ignorant of David’s help and full of himself—thinking that all the prosperity he has enjoyed has been his own doing. So, David is on his way to take from Nabal by force but Nabal’s wife, Abigail, takes some of the fruits of their goods and sends them to David and his men and this turns David from his anger.

It is exactly the same for us beloved.

We are the vineyard individually and as a Church community.

Have we individually and as a parish community produced fruit?

What do we have to show for what the Lord has given us?

All of us have been given possessions to a greater or lesser degree

All of us have been given good health to a greater or lesser degree

All of us have been given difficulties to a greater or lesser degree

The individual situation that each of us find ourselves in—whether we think it good or bad—has been given to us by God

What do offer to the Lord for his provision for us?

Saint Paul tells us the fruits of the Spirit are Love, joy peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Gal 5)

These are the fruits that our Lord is looking for from us.

Do others feel loved when they are around us?

Does joy shine forth from our faces?

Are we patient, kind and gentle with others?

Have we shown ourselves faithful to God and His Church?

These are the fruits God wants in return for the blessings he has given us

How do we produce these fruits?

We live the life of the Church—the life that the Church has offered us. This life is a life of prayer, a life of fasting a life of almsgiving, a life of worship

And through living this life our eyes are opened to the presence of God in our lives

Through living this life we recognize Christ the King guarding our vineyard like David guarded the vineyard of Nabal

Through living this life we offer back to God from the fruits of our possessions like Abigail offered to David

And when we do these things Christ comes and he enables us to produce more fruit through pruning us with the sword of the cross and watering us with the grace of the Holy Spirit so that we can grow and produce more fruit

But my beloved, it is painful to do this work, it is painful to be pruned by God with the cross

But remember it is through the cross that Joy has come into all the world

It is through the cross that we have life

It is important to remember though that if we do not, as individuals and as a community, live this life of the Church—prayer, fasting, alms and worship we will be blind to God's presence in our lives and we will scarcely even have the ability...to offer real and true love to those around us, we will scarcely have the ability to be patient, kind and gentle with others

The fruits of the Spirit will not be found in us.

All that we will have to offer God in that case are thorns and thistles—maybe a piece of malnourished fruit here and there—but not an abundant harvest

My beloved, the Lord is here in our lives, he is on the outskirts of our lives, welcome Him in, out of the wilderness and offer him hospitality in your heart—this is prayer!

Tell all other guests to leave your heart and offer your King the best seat at your table—this is fasting!

Spare no expense to shower the Master with gifts—this is almsgiving!

Then, and only then, will we offer true Worship—in Spirit and in Truth (Jn 4.24)—to our God.

May God be gracious unto us and help us, may He cause his face to shine upon us and have mercy on us. Amen.