

Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, Oct 8th 2017

Twenty-seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

Having three readings using the same image –vineyard– can actually confuse the message, misleading us to consider them superficially as repetitious, when in reality they are not. In fact each reading has a significantly different focus on the vineyard image.

The first reading is focused on the vineyard itself: it is the vineyard that fails, and Isaiah tells us: the Lord's vineyard is the house of Israel. Vatican II is telling us that we –the Church– are the people of God, the vineyard of the Lord, and this invites us to ask ourselves two important questions. First: are we, as persons, yielding an acceptable harvest? Second: are we, as Church, helping to bring about God's reign? It was the vineyard –we?– that failed.

In the Psalm the focus is on the vineyard's owner, God, who is seen by the psalmist as having "failed." The previous theme is repeated: the vineyard of the Lord is the house of Israel. The psalmist expresses the hurt of feeling abandoned by God: why have you abandoned your vineyard? Do we not, at least as individual persons, at times feel also abandoned by God? Jesus on the cross did.

The gospel's parable is focused on the tenants: it is they, who have failed, not the vineyard and not the owner. The owner did care for the vineyard: he planted a vineyard, put a hedge around it, dug a wine press in it and built a tower. The vineyard itself did yield a harvest that truly belonged to the owner, who was entitled to claim his part of the harvest. But the tenants grew greedy. They knew that, if the owner were to die without an heir, the law would give them the vineyard. So they killed the heir. The parable is about stewardship, not unlike the parable of the talents, but also about hardness of heart. The religious leaders rightly understood it as addressed to them. But it is also addressed to us as stewards of our received giftedness, which we may be tempted to hoard for our own benefit, disregarding God's claim on it.

Luis Rodriguez, S.J-Creighton University's Spiritual Ministry