

Matthew 21: 33-43

33 "Listen to this other story from life. There was an owner of a large estate who planted a vine, put a fence around it, dug a wine press and built a tower, then rented it out to farmers before going on a trip. 34 When harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the farmers to collect the produce of his harvest. 35 But the latter, after having seized the servants, mistreated one, killed the other, and put another to death by stoning. 36 The owner again sent other servants even more numerous than the first, but they subjected them to the exact same fate. 37 Finally, he sent his own son to them, saying, 'They will at least have respect for my son'. 38 But when they saw this son, the farmers said to themselves, 'Here is the heir. Come! Let us kill him and take possession of the inheritance'. 39 So they seized him, brought him out of the vineyard and murdered him. 40 So when the owner returns to his vineyard, what will he do to these farmers?" 41 They answered him, "He will miserably destroy these wicked, and will entrust the vineyard to other farmers, who will deliver the harvest on time". 42 Jesus said to them, "Have you never read this passage in the Bible:

The stone that the builders had rejected
later became the cornerstone.
It happened because of the Lord,
and what we see is wonderful.

43 Therefore I say to you, "The domain of God will be taken from you, to be entrusted to a people who will be able to make it bear fruit."

Gospel commentary - Homily

This land given to me to cultivate

Understanding the parable of rebellious winegrowers is not very difficult. A man has made an investment in a farm, and has the unpleasant surprise of not only being denied his due, but also of undergoing a personal attack in the attempt to seize his property and the murder of his son, presumed heir. Question: how will this owner react? It is easy to answer: this owner will get rid of these workers as soon as possible and replace them with others.

It is also easy to translate this situation into the context of our everyday life. How would you react if you had entrusted your savings to a broker for investment in retirement saving plan, and one day you found yourself with almost nothing, due to reckless and ill-advised investments? You would get rid of this broker as soon as possible and probably take him to court.

What is less obvious is to clarify where Jesus is heading to with this parable. For his part, the evangelist Matthew clearly intends to associate the revolted winegrowers with this part of the Jewish people who has closed down to the Christian faith, and thus explain its replacement in God's plan by the community of Christians. Jesus himself probably used this parable to urge religious leaders to be aware: you have deviated from your mission, you have confiscated for your profit what God has entrusted to you, and if that does not change, you will have to face the very rejection of God.

But on our side, what exactly does this parable refer to? I think that it refers to our deep situation of being human: we are beings which exist only because we have received everything, ie life and how to live, and are called to give back life and teaching on how to live. There are therefore two dimensions: we are not the owners of life, and we are called to make this life bear fruit so that others are born into life. These two dimensions are found in the parable.

So where is the problem? The problem is multiple things like the following. Recently, we were eating with a friend who is in her early 50s. Then, in the middle of the meal, she said, "I realize over time that our parents never really loved us, they rather used us". And now at the end of a life, when they should reap the fruit of their work of love, parents face bumpy and half-broken relationships. Can we fire parents like we fire a broker? And I feel myself challenged: do I, too, at work or at home, use those for which I am responsible to achieve my own ambitions, to satisfy my own needs?

What then happens in a human being to deviate from his path in this way? An illusion. An astounding illusion. And fear. The illusion is told in this famous tale of Eve in the Garden of Eden: "... 'Your eyes will open and you will be like gods, who know good and evil.' The woman saw that the tree was good to eat and attractive to see ... "

The illusion is to think that by escaping his condition as a creature, by fleeing this limited and fragile world, by not depending on anyone for his subsistence and the recognition of his value, in short by becoming what we imagine to be God, we are going to know nirvana. This is how parents can look at their children, not as they are, but as they see them in the projection of their desires and their fantasies. This is how we are unable to feel the beauty, the grandeur, the joy of each moment spent with someone we are trying to understand, educate, reprimand, guide. One imagines happiness in the manner of a basin which collects and retains all the surrounding waters, rather than a river which gives back to the ocean the water it has received.

And there is fear, this famous fear that makes me store for fear of the future. Who knows if my children will pay me back and take care of me in my old age. Fear is the reverse side of faith. As much as faith builds multiple relationships, so much fear breaks them. Let us not be surprised to hear Jesus repeat, "Why are you afraid, people of little faith?"

Personally, just like you, I have to fight to unceasingly discover the grandeur of this land which is given to me to cultivate, to reject as illusions those "elsewhere" where I would escape from my fate with its constraints and his limits. I have to overcome this constant fear of relying on others for my future. This fight is worth it, because the happiness is there, and not elsewhere. In this way I become a being who gives fruit at the right time, who gives as much if not more than what he received. But there is more. Would I not discover a little more this mysterious Being who, far from being self-sufficient, wanted this relationship to a fragile and limited world?