

Two weeks ago Jesus taught with a parable about a vineyard owner hiring laborers for his vineyard ... laborers who were not **satisfied** working for the agreed-to wage. Last week Jesus told us about the vineyard owner trying to get his sons to help with the **work** in the vineyard ... one said he would not ... but did! The other said he would ... but didn't! And today ... both Jesus and Isaiah bring us back to the vineyard yet again. Just why was it that the vineyard and its owner, his sons, tenants, laborers and even the grapes figure so prominently in these teachings? These images were so very meaningful in that agrarian society. Wine was the common drink ... for everyone. You didn't have wine without grapes and there were no grapes without vineyards. So the vineyard was an image that was meaningful to all.

As our psalm tells us: ***“the vineyard of the Lord is the house of Israel.”*** ... God's chosen people ... first the Jews ... now us! The landowner was, of course, our Heavenly Father. The abused and murdered servants were the many prophets that the Lord had sent over several hundred years. And the landowner's son was ... of course ... our Lord ... Jesus Christ Himself. Finally ... the new tenants to whom the vineyard was to be entrusted are, of course, His chosen apostles and ... all those who would follow their lead!

In our first reading ... Isaiah tells of his friend's vineyard that ... in spite of all his friend's hard work ... yielded only wild grapes ... unfit for anything! So that vineyard had to be destroyed! Isaiah explains: The vineyard is the house of Israel, and the people of Judah ... who had so badly disappointed and angered God ... were the grapes! Time after time Israel would abandon God and go their own way! It never went well. Time after time God would send His help and save them from their folly! And they would pledge their obedience ... until the next time! And the cycle would begin again and the grapes would turn wild ... **sour**.

So just who was Jesus speaking to with today's parable? First and foremost ... He was directly and clearly addressing the chief priests, scribes, elders, Pharisees and Sadducees and all those who followed them. They were the wicked tenants. Oh, they said that their opposition to Jesus was because of His disregard for the sabbath and other laws. But the truth was they were interested only in the **letter** of the law where Jesus was interested not in the letter but in the **spirit** of the law! They saw the crowds of thousands of people who were following Jesus and feared that they were losing their grip as those in authority. These leaders saw the influence that Jesus had on the people and feared that they would lose their positions of glory and honor. So they plotted against Him and would, of course, ultimately have Him murdered!

And so we might be asking ourselves: what has this to do with us in 2023? A **lot!** ... But we are **here** today! Don't tell me ... now this deacon is going to preach to us ... preach to the choir! And that is true you are all here! But **look!** Look at the times we live in! We live in a culture that proclaims itself **post-Christian** ... a culture where the weakest of us ... the unborn ... no longer have the right to even **exist** ... all in the name of **rights!** And in Europe ... once the cradle of Christianity ... The Church is often described as being on **life-support!**

In our own society ... indisputably the wealthiest nation on earth ... we have thousands of poor and homeless. Do we pile up things we don't need ... just because we can ... while ignoring others in our society who do not even have the necessities of life. I know I have been guilty of this? Did not our Lord tell us that: what we do ... or don't do ... for His least ones... we do ... or don't do ... for Him? Do we look at the situation and say "it's too overwhelming ... I can't make a difference!" We need to remember what St. Theresa of Calutta taught us: "We are not called to be successful ... we are called to be faithful!"