

**13<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST  
AUGUST 13/26, 2007**

**I CORINTHIANS 16: 13-24**

**ST. MATTHEW 21: 33-44**

Fr. Dr. Photios+ (W)

*Gospel....Hear another parable: There was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country: And when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it. And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another. Again, he sent other servants more than the first: and they did unto them likewise. But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son. But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance. And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him. When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen? They say unto him, he will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons. Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes? Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: and on whomsoever it shall fall, it will crush him to powder to be scattered.*

Christ, again, uses the spiritual vehicle of the parable as the best method of communicating His message. He “speaks in parables in order to move the minds of His hearers by means of examples, and to present matters more clearly, and to implant in the souls of His listeners an ever-abiding remembrance of His words”.<sup>1</sup>

## Who Are The 'Players' In This Parable?

The householder is the Lord. He plants a vineyard, which is the Jewish people, and they are planted in the land of promise. The hedge around it is the Law which kept them from mixing with the Gentiles. Alternatively, it could be considered holy angels guarding Israel. The winepress is the altar and the tower, the temple. He lets it to husbandmen, who "are the teachers of the people, the Pharisees and the scribes". God then goes into a far country meaning He no longer speaks to them in a cloud pillar. Or, God going into the far country could mean "His long-suffering".<sup>2</sup>

The time of the fruit draws near, really the "products of a way of life; obedience (is required), proving by deeds the fulfillment of the Law". It was during the age of the prophets that the fruits were gathered and received. God sent his servants, the prophets, to seek out the fruits, which are man's deeds.<sup>3</sup>

## How Are The Servants Treated? Any Better Treatment For His Son?

The husbandmen, the teachers of the people treat them badly (to say the least).<sup>4</sup> They beat Micah, killed Zachariah, the father of John the Forerunner of Christ, stoned a different Zachariah, the son of Jehoiada the high priest. And then God sent His Son Who appeared in the flesh. Not only did they not honour Him but the husbandmen, the teachers, urged He be killed. "The Jews, too, said, 'This is the Christ,' and they crucified Him."<sup>5</sup> They handed Him over to His death and crucified Him outside the vineyard (Jerusalem).<sup>6</sup>

But since we would also say that the vineyard is the people, Christ was slain by the Pharisees, the evil husbandmen, outside the vineyard, that is, **outside and apart from the will of the guileless people** (emphasis supplied).<sup>7</sup>

The "elders of the people, the chief priests, scribes and Pharisees are the wicked husbandmen and transgressors of the Law".<sup>8</sup> It is clear that the people at large were not the ringleaders; it was their leaders! The "simple and guileless" multitude believed Christ to be a prophet. They followed the truth "while the teachers of the law work evil".<sup>9</sup>

## What Penalty Lies In Store For the Husbandmen?

At first glance, the words *When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh* might mean His Second Coming. However, according to Blessed Theophylact and the other Fathers a better explanation would be that God is the lord of the vineyard Who sent His Son, and He was killed by them. After His Resurrection and Ascension "He looks down on the lawless which the Jews committed, then He will miserably destroy them by sending the Roman army".<sup>10</sup> He will then give his vineyard, the people, to other husbandmen, the Apostles, teachers and wise hierarchs and pastors who follow to shepherd the faithful.<sup>11</sup>

## Another View

Blessed Theophylact provides another view. The vineyard could also mean the Holy Scriptures, the hedge is the letter and the wine-press that was dug, the depth of the Spirit. The tower is the lofty and exalted theology. The Divine Scriptures were originally possessed by “bad husbandmen, the Pharisees; but God has let them out to us who cultivate them well. But they slew the Lord outside the vineyard, that is, outside those things of which Scripture spoke”.<sup>12</sup>

We are entrusted with the Holy Scriptures for us to live godly lives and take loving care of the vineyard so “seasonable and abundant fruits” may flow forth.<sup>13</sup>

## The Cornerstone And The Consequences Of ‘Stumbling’ against It

At the end of today’s Gospel, Christ refers to the stone the builders, being the Jews, have rejected. That stone is Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. He had come to join together and reconcile what had been separate and make the two walls one. Christ is the cornerstone, the head of the Church which joins “Jews and Gentiles in one faith”:

For as the stone which forms the corner of a building makes continuous the walls leading to it and from it, so Christ has bound all together in one faith. The corner is marvelous, and is the Lord’s doing.<sup>14</sup>

The kingdom of God has been taken away from the Jews and given to believers, “a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof”. When you stumble against the Rock of Christ and “take offence at Him,” you will suffer two consequences: in this life and at the Second Coming:

Those who stumble against the Rock of Christ and take offence at Him will not only be crushed at the Second Coming, but already here in this life they have been scattered like powder by Christ. They have been scattered over all the earth, as we now see the pitiable Jews to be. Understand that he who is ‘crushed to powder to be scattered’ is dispersed abroad and scattered in diaspora.<sup>15</sup>

Looked at then from the Gospel and the Fathers of the One Holy Catholic & Apostolic Church, the True Orthodox Church of both the East and the West, the Jews because of their recalcitrance and rejection of Christ are scattered across the earth according to God’s will. However, this parable does not just rebuke the unbelieving Jews “but also believers who spurn the divine commandments and the injunctions of Christ; for those who sin and imagine that God does not see the future also crucify the Lord”.<sup>16</sup>

When Christ comes to judge everyone in His Second Coming, He will bring the unbelievers, the evil ones, to their justice sending them into the unquenchable fire, “which is outside the light; there, as He said, shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth”!<sup>17</sup>

The lesson for us in a nutshell? Work hard spiritually, cultivate the Lord’s vineyard, read the Divine Scriptures faithfully, and do good works which manifest our faith in Him. We must make ourselves ready to gather the fruits of the vineyard. Fill our hearts with the inexpressible sweetness which is the love of Christ; and

may we be vouchsafed divine blessedness; may we enter the royal vineyard on high to gather its beautiful grapes and mystically to squeeze them in the winepresses of our hearts; may we be satisfied and filled with their sweetness, and enjoy the new and immortal drink that comes from the true Vine.<sup>18</sup>

+ In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Gospel Commentary (Lessons Taken from the Holy Gospel and from Many of the Divine Writings of Our Father among the Saints, John Chrysostom)* (translated from the Slavonic into English by Hieromonk German Ciuba), Russian Orthodox Church of the Nativity of Christ (Old Rite), Erie, Pennsylvania, 2002, p. 383.

<sup>2</sup> Blessed Theophylact, *Explanations of the Holy Gospel of St. Matthew, Vol. I*, (translated from the original Greek by Fr. Christopher Stade) Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO, 1997, p. 182.

<sup>3</sup> *The Gospel Commentary, op. cit.*, p. 386.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Bl. Theophylact, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

<sup>6</sup> *The Gospel Commentary, op. cit.*, 386.

<sup>7</sup> Bl. Theophylact, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

<sup>8</sup> *The Gospel Commentary, op. cit.*, p. 386.

<sup>9</sup> Bl. Theophylact, *op. cit.*, p. 185.

<sup>10</sup> *id.*, p. 183.

<sup>11</sup> *id.*, pp. 183-184 and see *The Gospel Commentary, op. cit.*, p. 387.

<sup>12</sup> Bl. Theophylact, *op. cit.*, p. 184.

<sup>13</sup> *The Gospel Commentary, op. cit.*, p. 387.

<sup>14</sup> Bl. Theophylact, *op. cit.*, p. 184 and for concurrence see *The Gospel Commentary, op. cit.*, p. 388.

<sup>15</sup> Bl. Theophylact, *op. cit.*, p. 184.

<sup>16</sup> *The Gospel Commentary, op. cit.*, pp. 388-389.

<sup>17</sup> *id.*, p. 389.

<sup>18</sup> *id.*