

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

A vineyard is the setting for the two parables before us today, one out of the Old Testament and one from Matthew's Gospel, though Jesus' parable is found in all three Synoptic Gospels. Moreover, the figure of a vine is quite prevalent in the Scriptures as a picture of Israel — and, by extension, the Church. That's what we have before us today. Isaiah tells us that the vineyard represents Israel: *“the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are his pleasant planting.”* And it doesn't take too much work to figure out that the vineyard represents the same in Jesus' parable.

The vineyard belongs to the LORD — in Isaiah, it belongs to *“my beloved”* and in Matthew, it belongs to the *“master of the house,”* but it's the LORD'S. He cleared the land and planted the vineyard; He put a fence around it; He built a watchtower and dug a winepress. There are some small differences in these descriptions, but they're of little consequence to the point of the parables. The same is true, by the way, for the Church — she is Christ's Church, belonging to the beloved Son of the Father. She is built by Him and on Him; planted by the seed of His word and watered; bearing a bountiful harvest, a hundred, sixty, or thirtyfold.

The two parables, however, are not mere echoes of each other. Indeed, it's at this point that the two parables start to diverge. In Isaiah's vineyard, the owner of the vineyard, the LORD Himself, is the vinedresser. And the issue with the vineyard was that it yielded wild grapes instead of good; *“bloodshed”* instead of *“justice”*; *“an outcry”* instead of *“righteousness.”*

Why such wild grapes? Impenitence and unfaithfulness. Wild grapes are the fruit of unfaithfulness. They are the fruit of branches unpruned and undisciplined, left to grow on their own with no care. They become detached from the true Israel, the true Vine Himself, and eventually become fruitless, good for nothing except to be cut off and tossed into the fire and burned.

A lament goes up from the LORD. *“What more was there to do for my vineyard, that I have not done in it?”* The LORD purposes to tear the fruitless vineyard down and hand it over to decay, and in those days of old He does it through the armies of Assyria.

But it's not handed over to utter destruction. No, the LORD would preserve a remnant; He would replant the vineyard; and, in the fullness of time, He would bring forth His beloved as the Savior, the pure fruit from the womb of Mary, sent to redeem us from condemnation and eternal destruction.

*“What more was there to do for my vineyard, that I have not done in it?”* The LORD had a plan, and He had set it in motion. Which leads us into Jesus' vineyard

parable and its distinctives. This vineyard was leased to tenant farmers — the chief priests and Pharisees would come to realize that Jesus wasn't so much talking about all of Israel; He was talking about them. They wouldn't share the fruit of the vineyard.

The master sent servants who were met with bloodshed rather than justice. They were beaten and killed and stoned; they were the prophets whom God sent to Israel. Thus, Jesus would shortly say: *“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! ... you witness against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. ... O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it”* (Matt. 23:29, 31, 37). In an extraordinary display of grace rather than justice, the master sent even more servants, and they were treated the same.

Still more amazing grace was to come from the master. He sent his son, saying: *“They will respect my son.”* They did not. They threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. The chief priests and Pharisees were preparing to do just that. They were preparing to consummate the climax of this parable ... the killing of the Son. For the LORD Himself would send His one and only Son, Jesus. And He would be driven outside the walls of the city, lifted up on a cross, and killed. The Rock, God's stone, was already despised; He was but days away from being rejected unto death by these men. He was about to be *“pierced for our transgressions [and] ... crushed for our iniquities”*; *“the chastisement”* that the world deserved was about to be laid upon Him, that we might have peace. He was about to be wounded with thorns and nails and spear, that we might be healed (Is. 53:3, 5).

These words from Isaiah surely transport us to Good Friday; they're the Old Testament reading for Good Friday, and they're spoken there to us. These words, too, from today's Old Testament lesson are chanted in lament in the Good Friday Reproaches; they're spoken to us: *“Thus says the Lord: What have I done to you, O my people, and wherein have I offended you? Answer me.” “I have raised you up out of the prison house of sin and death ... I have redeemed you from the house of bondage ... I have conquered all your foes ... I have fed you with my Word and refreshed you with living water ... I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad? My people, is this how you thank your God?”*

Is this how we thank Him, by delivering *“up [our] Redeemer to be scourged ... [by nailing our] Savior to the cross ... [by giving Jesus] over [to death] and [delivering Him] to those who persecute [Him] ... [by giving Him, by our sin,] gall and vinegar to drink”*?

Yes, these words are not just for the Jews of old. We apply them to ourselves, that we might be led to repentance, that we might bear fruit in keeping with repentance, that we might not receive the just consequence for our sin.

For who would think that they could do what those tenant farmers did to the son and get away with it? They apparently did. Who among those chief priests and Pharisees would think that they could do what they did to the Son of God Himself and get away with it? They apparently did. O my people, who would think that we could do the same to God's beloved Son?

May it never be! That's deluded thinking, and we know what that deserves! "*He will put those wretches to a miserable death!*" Should that stone that the builders rejected fall on us, we will be crushed. May it never be! Rather, repent! Fall on that stone and be broken into pieces. Trust in the promise: God does not despise "*a broken and contrite heart*" (Ps. 51:17).

And cry out to this stone for mercy. "Holy Lord God, holy and mighty God, holy and most merciful Redeemer; God eternal, leave us not to bitter death. O Lord, have mercy."

"Holy Lord God, holy and mighty God, holy and most merciful Redeemer; God eternal, allow us not to lose hope in the face of death and hell. O Lord, have mercy."

"Holy Lord God, holy and mighty God, holy and most merciful Redeemer; God eternal, keep us steadfast in the true faith. O Lord, have mercy."

"Lamb of God, pure and holy, Who on the cross didst suffer, Ever patient and lowly, Thyself to scorn didst offer. All sins Thou borest for us, Else had despair reigned o'er us: Have mercy on us, O Jesus!" "Thy peace be with us, O Jesus!" (LSB434:1, 3)

Yes, you blessed of the Lord, repent! And trust! Cry out: "*Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit*" (Ps. 51:10-12). Be of good courage, and wait for the Lord, for blessed words await you: "*Come, ... inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world*" (Matt. 25:34).

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.