

NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Matthew 21:33-46

In the parable in our Gospel reading for today, Jesus is talking about the people of Israel and how they had rejected God by beating and killing the prophets, and would soon beat and kill his Son. This parable had a special application to the church of Jesus' day, but, we would be blind if that is all we could see in this story. God is the owner, but how often do we act as if *we* are the owners.

However, we are tenants, not owners. We sometimes imagine that we are owners, but in the broadest sense, everything we have is on loan from God. It's clear from the beginning of creation, in the very first pages of the Bible, when God gave Adam and Eve the Garden of Eden, that they didn't own it, they were tenants.

We are made and owned by God. Our life is not ours to own like we own a quad, or a new boat, or a new car, or a wide screen surround sound digital TV system, and so we can do whatever we please with it. We're God's property. Life is a gift, just as the quad, or a new boat, or a new car, and wide screen surround sound digital TV system are gifts, to be used with God the Creator in mind. We have a responsibility to use his gifts wisely and faithfully. And God gives his gifts in the hope of finding a harvest of fruit, fruit like honoring, loving and trusting God above anything else, and in our dealings with others, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility

and self-control.

Jesus was talking to His followers in His day through this parable, and so we should focus on that special gift that God has given to us, the church in our day. Like the landowner, He has generously and graciously given us the church to care for, with our goal being the same as the tenants in our Gospel today, to reap a rich harvest of souls.

But we are often guilty of acting as if we *own* the church. It doesn't matter if we are talking about the church throughout the world, or if we are talking about the Church here on the local scene, the church is the people of God, saved by Jesus' death and resurrection, the church is the fellowship of believers who are loved by our heavenly Father who speaks to us through the Scriptures and shows us his love through the water of baptism, and through the body and blood of Jesus in Holy Communion. As God's people, we are given the Holy Spirit to encourage and support us every moment of our life. He keeps us together in Christ through forgiveness and reconciliation. As Peter says, the church consists of people who have been chosen by God. Not only is the church a gift, but our place in the church is also a gift from God.

Since the church is God's *gift* to us, as those who belong to the church through the gracious invitation of our Lord, shouldn't we be asking, what He want us to do? Let's not just think of the church as an organization in our local area, but think also of the Church Universal and what He want us, the people of the church to do. Many of the clergy and leadership in Congregations, Parishes and Diocese are engaged in a process to discern where God is leading us.

The parable in our Gospel reading today is leading us to ask ourselves, "What does God want *us*, the people who He saved

with the blood of His own Son, to do?" This is the question that we as church must ask. "Lord, what do you want us, your church, to do?"

Our parable is leading us to ask questions like, "What does God want to do for this community through us, his church? What does God want us to do to help and encourage those who are facing tough times, whether they are the result of their own making, or just happen because they are part of fallen humanity.

What does God want us to do to make worship meaningful across all generations? What does God want us to do so that all children are taught about the love Jesus has for them? What does God want us to do in order to make the best use of the many gifts, Spiritual and Material, that he has given us to further his work in this community?

Whatever other important questions arise, we always need to remind ourselves that this is not our church, this is God's Church. The one who created the church, paid for it with the death of his Son. And so the first and vital question that needs to be asked is this, "What does the Lord, the owner of the church, want us to do to serve our Master faithfully?"

As individuals, we come with all kinds of ideas and answers to this question. Each of us understands the mission and ministry of the church in different ways, but together, as the fellowship of believers, we wrestle with what God wants us to do. We sometimes disagree with God and amongst ourselves about it, as we are challenged to be church in our community, and as individuals we may have to change our ideas, and that means not always getting our own way. If we, as church, still don't know what God wants us to do, we need to listen to him carefully again with open minds, and pray all the more earnestly about it. We can take heart. The church is God's. Being the church is not

all left up to us. We are God's church, God's people, filled with the Holy Spirit to struggle with us and guide us, as we seek ways to actively be the church in the world.

We are here today because we have a Saviour who has died and rose for us. We have a Master who has given His life for us so that we can have forgiveness and eternal life. May God through his Holy Spirit continue to bless His church and give us an ever-greater vision of what He wants for the church, and what it means for us to be the church, people bringing a rich and fruitful harvest for God.

As great as the temptation always is to be a cosy and comfortable and to simply look after ourselves, let's be open to the prompting and guiding of the Holy Spirit, to be a witnessing and serving church. May God richly bless and guide us as we ask, "Lord, what do you want *us*, your church, to do?"

AMEN.