

27TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME – YEAR A (2026)

Today's Gospel parable, traditionally known as that of the 'Wicked Tenants', situates us in a vineyard for the third consecutive Sunday; and, whilst the parables of the Labourers in the Vineyard and the Two Sons can be interpreted and applied on their own merits, today's must be read in conjunction with our first reading from the prophet Isaiah, which contains what is known as the 'Song of the Vineyard'. Because, not only would this passage have sprung immediately to mind in Jesus' original hearers, and the parable been his own rabbinic commentary upon it; but also, because it emphasises that, in Jewish theology and self-understanding, the image of the vineyard had long stood for God's Chosen People, Israel. And so, as we seek to apply the significance of Jesus' allegory for ourselves, it's important that we unpack it to understand what he meant by it, and, thus, what the Church and the world can learn from it today.

First, let us be clear about the characters in the story: the owner of the vineyard is God the Father, who creates, protects, and provides everything necessary for his people to flourish. The vineyard itself, as we have already seen, is the people of Israel; but can also be, by extension, the Kingdom of God. The eponymous wicked tenants are the chief priests, scribes, and religious leaders of Jesus' day; those who had been entrusted with the spiritual care of God's people, but had, instead, sought their own power and prestige. The wicked tenants – crucially – are not the whole people of Israel. Next, the servants in the parable represent

the prophets of the Old Testament, sent by God to collect the fruit of righteousness, faithfulness and justice, many of whom were rejected, maltreated or killed by the religious leaders of their own days. And, finally, there is the son and heir, who is Jesus himself, whose use of this parable acted principally as a prediction of his own Passion and death – he, ‘the stone rejected by the builders’, whom God made the cornerstone of the new spiritual edifice of his Church.

And, whilst all of that might seem straightforward, many have used, and continue to use, this parable to justify a doctrine of replacement, or supersessionism, against the Jewish people. This interpretation arises from Jesus’ own words, ‘He will put those wretches to a miserable death and let out the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him their fruits in due season’. But this parable was not directed against the whole people of Israel, only against its corrupt religious leadership; and faithful Christians must not allow its misinterpretation at the hands of those who use it directly or indirectly to justify contemporary antisemitism, which is disgusting, diabolical and, increasingly, deranged. Here, of course, we are not talking politically about the modern state of Israel, but theologically about universal ethnic Jewry. No: God has not forgotten, rejected or cursed his Chosen People, Israel; and nor has he replaced them with smug and certain Christians. Rather, his covenant with Israel has been fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ, through his death on the Cross; and extended to all people, everywhere, through his Church. There is one history of God’s

covenant with humanity; and the promises made to Abraham, Moses and David remain eternally valid within the relationship between God and the Jewish people, whilst all people have been granted access to that covenant through faith in his incarnate, crucified and risen Son, the universal Saviour. God continues to fulfil his loving purposes and faithfulness in and towards his ancient Chosen People in ways that we do not and cannot know; and Christians must reject antisemitism in all its ugly and pernicious forms, as we seek, with our Jewish brothers and sisters, to witness to God's love, faithfulness, and desire that everyone might find redemption in him, the One true God and Father of us all. So, finally, what does the Parable of the Wicked Tenants say to us, who are granted the privilege and responsibilities of the tenancy of God's Church through baptism? In short, this parable serves both as a warning and an encouragement: a warning against complacency and spiritual hubris; and an encouragement to persevere in producing the fruits of faithful disciples in acts of charity, mercy and justice, which lead to personal growth in holiness. As always in the spiritual life, Jesus does not hold us responsible for the good or evil of others, but only for that for which we have agency; just as, in the final analysis, we will be judged, in part, for how we have used or stifled God's grace to make life better or worse for our fellow human beings, especially those whom it is fashionable to vilify. Everything else, including their eternal salvation, is in God's hands: there we must leave it, and attend assiduously to our own. Amen.