

We Are Tenants
October 2, 2011

The beauty of literature is that there are so many ways to write and tell a story...there are so many tools to use to get your point across. For instance, one can be literal...figurative...symbolic...metaphoric...historic...and so on.

Our Gospel today is no different.

The parable that Jesus tells the chief priests and the elders of the people is a great example of the use of allegory.

Allegory is speaking under the guise of something else. It goes beyond what a narrative says on the surface to reveal a deeper meaning...a deeper link with reality.

And so, every character and element of an allegory represents various things of life and more importantly, things of the spiritual order.

Let's take a look now at what this means for us and our Gospel today.

There was a Landowner who planted a vineyard:

- The Landowner is God:
 - Creator of all things
- The Vineyard that was planted represents Israel:
 - Israel = God's chosen people
 - They are formed like God...after His own heart
 - They Act like Him, Think like Him, Love like Him
 - They are meant to be fruitful by leading others to Christ and thus, to salvation
 - For our understanding today, Israel is also:
 - The land flowing with milk and honey
 - Freedom and Salvation
 - Nature, life, our bodies...the world
 - This will be an important understanding for later

Put a hedge around it:

- The hedge is protection by God
- God promises to protect us...”not a hair on our heads will be harmed”...and He gives us this through:
 - Laws, Rules, Commandments, a New Covenant
- The hedge is not meant to be a constriction on our freedom... rather, it is meant to keep evil out of our lives and make us fit for the kingdom of heaven

Dug a wine press in it:

- The vineyard’s role is to produce grapes...and grapes are meant to produce wine
- Wine represents Israel’s very life
 - Seen in songs, psalms, prayers of the temple and so on

And built a tower:

- Once again, this is the protection that God promises us as His children
- He is keeping guard, watching over us and defending us

Then he leased it to tenants:

- This is where things get interesting
- God gives the people of Israel – and at this point, we can substitute ourselves in this – the honor and privilege of presiding over the vineyard, which rightfully belongs to God
- He didn’t have to give us the honor...but He did
- As such, we don’t own the vineyard and we can do nothing to take ownership of it...we are simply stewards / renters if you will
- For that matter, we don’t own anything...all that we have (talents, family, friends, possessions, life itself) is a gift from God
- Our life is not about us...we don’t own it...God does...so, our life is about God and pointing back to God

- Our world contradicts this...our contemporary secularism says our life is our own and that we should be in control
- But, that's not the case...we are merely tenants temporarily renting our life, which belongs solely to God

He sent his servants to obtain his produce:

- The servants are the patriarchs and prophets...and disciples... who were sent to reap the fruit from the vineyard

The tenants seized the servants and one they beat, another they killed, and a third they stoned:

- The people of Israel, the tenants, react in a very uncharitable way to the servants and ultimately, to the Landowner
 - They violently reject them
- How sad and unfortunate this is
- Do we ever find ourselves rejecting – mocking, belittling, dismissing – others speaking in God's name?
- And what's worse is that all this is done more than once...it's repeated time and time again with **other servants more numerous than the first**

Finally, he sent his son thinking, "They will respect my son":

- The Landowner means business now and sends his own flesh and blood...someone who represents himself, not just the business
- The son is not only the heir to the vineyard, but of course is Christ Jesus, the Son of God
- The Landowner sends him thinking that finally, the tenants will listen and straighten up...but, that's not the case, is it?

Come, let us kill him and acquire his inheritance. They seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him:

- The tenants really believe that if the son is out of the picture, the heir to the business, the landowner will throw the towel in and walk away...essentially giving the vineyard to the tenants
- By this act, the tenants not only reject the landowner and his son, but in killing the son, they attempt to take possession of something that isn't theirs' to own: the vineyard, which, as we said, is freedom, salvation, nature, life, our bodies...the world
- They try to take ownership of their very lives
- Isn't this our first instinct to God...or at least, it's what society tells us should be our first instinct...that is to reject God and be in control / ownership of our own lives
- So, we throw God out of our lives and reject Him time and time again
- But, that's not the end of the story is it?

The owner of the vineyard will come and put those wretched men to a wretched death:

- In other words, Jesus rose from the dead...he came back...and promises to return again at the end of time and judge us according to our deeds

So, there really is no taking possession of the vineyard is there?

In reality, we are simply tenants...not owners...and we are called to take care of the vineyard that's been entrusted to us by the Owner...not control it.

So, are we tenants or are we trying to be owners?