

## FROM THE PASTOR'S PRINTER

## THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED

The gospels of the past few weeks have addressed the mercy of God and our acceptance of that mercy by accepting others in their weaknesses. This Sunday and next, we find the Gospel shifting to the repercussions of not accepting Jesus as the Lord and Messiah, particularly the Jewish leaders who would be responsible for Christ's death. Today's gospel (Mt. 21: 33-43) is the parable told to the chief priests and elders of the people, the enemies of Jesus, of the landowner who sends his servants to collect the harvest from the tenants, and twice the tenants kill the servants who were to collect the produce. Finally, he sends his son, thinking that they would never kill his son, but they do, thinking that what the son would inherit would go to them. Now, I don't want to disrespect the landowner (who really is God), but I don't think I would have kept sending unarmed servants after the first time, and certainly not my son.

Of course, like all parables, the purpose is to make us think, to reflect upon the story which has various depths of meaning. The surface meaning is the story itself which is not meant to be an account of a real situation. A deeper level is who the people behind the characters in the story are. The landowner is God; the produce of the vineyard is God's people: the tenants are the chief priests and elders; the servants sent to collect the harvest are the prophets; and, of course, the son is Jesus.

On a deeper level is the plot, and this is where the parable got me thinking (an amazing feat in itself). Why would the father not have come after the tenants with wrath immediately after the first set of servants were killed? Why send another group without police protection, and why would he send his son thinking that they would respect him? This is actually what God had done throughout the history of His Chosen People. As we pray in the fourth Eucharistic Prayer, "Time and again you offered them covenants, and through the prophets taught them to look

forward to salvation." God is always offering His people another chance, another opportunity to accept love and salvation from him who alone could offer it. Those he sent, and even to this day sends, are often murdered for their dangerous good news that upsets the status quo. Yet, so much does God love us that he is willing not only to call us back, but to send His Son to bring us back, knowing full well that he will be murdered by the very people he would come to save. One could clearly say that God is crazy in love with us. Yet, there is a method to God's madness. His Son's death will actually bring in the harvest that seemed to be foiled by his death. The tenants, despite their best efforts, could not truly kill the Son. They could kill his body, but not his divinity. By falling to the ground in death, pushed aside like a stone rejected by the builders, Christ rose up and brought the produce (God's people, remember) to his Father. Rejected by men, but chosen by God, he becomes the cornerstone of the house where those who seek communion with God, and the justice and peace of his kingdom will dwell forever. For those who rejected the plan of God, there was the price to pay: the judgment of God.

On an even deeper level, we have to ask "so what?" So what does this parable tell us about ourselves and God, not just about people who lived millennia ago. We can see that we are both the produce and the tenants. We have received blessing and nourishment to grow in the Lord, and yet we are also responsible for helping to bring in the harvest. We can first ask ourselves if we accept the nourishment offered by the good "tenants" to live as true children of God. We can also ask ourselves if we are good tenants, giving the Lord what is His due at the right times. Or are we tenants, who, while not killing God's servants, choose to "kill" His message of salvation. As always, the choice is ours.

Have a blessed week ahead. – Fr. Jeff