

## Sacred Heart Novena - 31 May to 8 June 2018

### HE LOVED WITH A HUMAN HEART

#### Day 5: Monday, 4 June – 9<sup>th</sup> Week in Ordinary Time – God of Infinite Chances

Reading: 2 Pet 1: 2-7; Responsorial Psalm: Ps 91; Gospel: Mk 12:1-12

We are in the 9<sup>th</sup> week in Ordinary Time and on the fifth day of our Novena. The parable from today's gospel is a familiar one - "*the Parable of the Wicked Tenants.*"

Today, I invite you to listen to the parable of Jesus again, as if hearing it for the first time and try to catch what it is that Jesus is revealing to us about God, about himself and about ourselves.

Jesus begins by telling us about the main character of the story: the owner of the vineyard. *A man planted a vineyard, he fenced it round, dug out a trough for the winepress, and built a tower.* Jesus is saying to us that our man did everything he should and could to have his vineyard ready, up and running. Peter, in his second letter is saying something similar about our Lord. "*By his divine power, he has given us all the things we need for life and for true devotion.*" (2 Peter 1:2) That sounds like the owner of the vineyard to me - he has done everything to make it a good vineyard. *Then he leased it to tenants and went abroad.* The vineyard owner leaves fully trusting that the tenants will take care of it, and will fulfil their agreement, their covenant with him. We know how the story continues. *When the time came, he sent a servant to the tenants to collect from them his share...But they seized the man, thrashed him and sent him away empty-handed.* What does the owner of the vineyard do? Does he send the authorities to his vineyard to put the tenants to prison? No, the owner does not do this. Instead, he gives the tenants a second chance...and a third...and many more until he ran out of servants to send. Did he now decide to have those tenants killed? No he does not! Instead he does something totally unexpected -*He had still someone left: His beloved son. He sent him to them last of all. 'They will respect my son' he said.* The owner kept on believing in the goodness of the tenants. In spite of his previous experience, he still decided to trust them and he sent to them his own beloved son! But the tenants killed him too. End of the parable.

And then Jesus asked his listeners: "*Now what will the owner of the vineyard do?*" In Mark's Gospel which we read today, the answer comes immediately making it unclear who said it. Was it Jesus or was it the listeners? The same parable is found in Matthew's gospel and there it is clear that it is the listeners of Jesus who give the answer. *They said to him "He will put those wretched men to a miserable death and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the harvest time."* (Mt 21:41) So from Matthew, we realize that it is actually the listeners of Jesus - the chief priests, the scribes and elders - who made the conclusion. As they listened to the story, they probably felt more and more angry with the tenants. Those are wicked tenants! They must die!

And then Jesus said to them "*Have you not read this text of scripture: It was the stone rejected by the builders that became the keystone, this was the Lord's doing and it is wonderful to see.*" And they realized that the parable was aimed at them and they wanted to arrest Jesus. What happened there?

The people questioning Jesus were the leaders of Israel, they are the “builders” and as a matter of fact, they are rejecting Jesus. In a way, Jesus was making them see that he is the stone they are rejecting, the precious cornerstone. In the parable then, Jesus is the beloved son...and they are the ones who rejected the beloved son, meaning, they are the tenants.

The style of Jesus reminds me of Nathan the prophet when he confronted David with his sin. He told the story of a rich man with thousands of sheep. When he had visitors, instead of killing one of his many sheep, he took the one and only beloved lamb of his poor neighbour. David was furious and said “that man must die!” Nathan said “You are that man!” Jesus told the parable of the wicked tenants and his listeners were furious. They said “those tenants must die” and Jesus made them realize that they are those tenants!” Unlike David who repented when he realized his sin, the chief priests, scribes and elders wanted to arrest Jesus and went away angry.

The Parable of the Wicked Tenants, can also be called the Parable of the Good Vineyard Owner. The parable ends with his beloved son killed. It is the listeners who demand that the tenants be killed as well. But will the owner of the vineyard do this? We know the story of Jesus, the Beloved Son. Yes, he is sent by the Father to his vineyard. Yes, he is killed. At the end, the people who killed Jesus, were they killed? No! The Father did something totally unexpected - he raised his Son back to life ...and gave the “tenants” yet another chance.

What is Jesus revealing to us about God in this parable? That God is a loving, forgiving God who does not run out of chances to give us whenever we fail, whenever we sin. Pope Francis never tires in forgiving us, it is us who get tired asking for forgiveness.

So God is the owner of the vineyard, the forgiving God of infinite chances.

Jesus is the Beloved Son who gives his life for love of the Father.

What about ourselves, who are we in the story? Are we the tenants who are unfaithful to the covenant, breaking the agreement, doing things that cause pain and suffering to others, blind to the many chances that God give us to change our ways...

Or are we the chief priests, scribes and elders, good people, faithful, obedient to the commandments but unable to accept others who are not as good as ourselves, wanting punishment for those who do wrong, turning away in anger when confronted with our faults... Who are we in the story?

*By his divine power, the Lord has given us all the things that we need for life and for true devotion, bringing us to know God himself who has called us by his own glory and goodness.*

Tomorrow, there will be the sacrament of reconciliation. Our God of infinite chances is again giving us another chance to respond to his call and encounter his love, his mercy, his forgiveness.

So, until tomorrow...*le cunamh de!*