



*Light and
Love in the
darkness*

CELEBRATING AT HOME LECTIO DIVINA FOR 27TH SUNDAY

Stewards of God's gift (Mt 21:33-43)

This resource is presented by the Carmelites of Australia & Timor-Leste at a time when we cannot gather together as we usually do to celebrate the Eucharist. We are conscious that Christ is present not only in the Blessed Sacrament but also in the words of the Gospel and in our own hearts. Even when we are on our own we remain part of the Body of Christ.

In the room you decide to use for Lectio Divina you could have a lighted candle and the Bible. These symbols help keep us mindful of the sacredness of our time of prayer.

Lectio Divina has four main stages. The first stage is *lectio* (reading) where we read the Word of God, slowly and reflectively so that it sinks into us.

The second stage is *meditatio* (reflection) where we think about the text we have chosen and ruminate upon it so that we take from it what God wants to give us.

The third stage is *oratio* (response) where we leave our thinking aside and simply let our hearts speak to God. This response is inspired by our reflection on the Word of God.

The final stage of Lectio Divina is *contemplatio* (rest) where we let go not only of our own ideas, plans and meditations but also of our holy words and thoughts. We simply rest in the Word of God. We listen at the deepest level of our being to God who speaks within us. As we listen, we are gradually transformed from within. This transformation will have a profound effect on the way we actually live our daily lives.

As you use this prayer know that the Carmelites will be remembering in our prayer you and all the members of our family at this time.

CELEBRATING AT HOME

LECTIO DIVINA FOR 27TH SUNDAY

Prayer

Create silence in us so that we may listen to your voice in Creation and in the Scriptures, in events and in people, above all in the poor and suffering. May your word guide us so that we too, like the two disciples on the way to Emmaus, may experience the force of your resurrection and witness to others that you are alive in our midst as source of fraternity, justice and peace. We ask this of you, Jesus, son of Mary, who revealed the Father to us and sent us Your Spirit. Amen.

A key to the reading

Matthew frames the parable of the murderous tenants between two other parables: the one of the two sons (21:28-32) and that of the wedding banquet (22:1-14). All three parables contain a negative reply: that of the son to his father, that of some tenants to the owner of the vineyard, and that of some invited guests to the king who is celebrating the wedding of his son. All three parables tend to point to one single point. Those who, because they have not accepted the preaching and baptism of John, are now unanimous in refusing the final invitation of God in the person of Jesus. The introduction to the first parable in 21:28-33 should also be considered as the introduction to the parable of the murderous tenants: *After Jesus had entered the temple precincts, and while He was teaching, the chief priests and elders of the people came up to Him and said: On what authority do you do these things? Who has given you this power?*

It is the priestly and secular aristocracy that goes to Jesus when he was in the temple. They are worried by Jesus' popularity and ask him questions to know two things: what authority he attributes to himself in doing what he does, and the origin of this authority. In fact, the answer to the second question also gives the answer to the first question. The high priests and leaders of the people demand a juridical proof and they forget that the prophets had authority directly from God.

Read (Matthew 21:33-43)

Jesus said to the chief priests and elders of the people, 'Listen to another parable. There was a man, a landowner, who planted a vineyard; he fenced it round, dug a winepress in it and built a tower; then he leased

it to tenants and went abroad. When vintage time drew near he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his produce. But the tenants seized his servants, thrashed one, killed another and stoned a third. Next he sent some more servants, this time a larger number, but they dealt with them in the same way. Finally he sent his son to them. 'They will respect my son,' he said. But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, 'This is the heir. Come on, let us kill him and take over his inheritance.' So they seized him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?' They answered, 'He will bring those wretches to a wretched end and lease the vineyard to other tenants, who will deliver the produce to him when the season arrives.' Jesus said to them, 'Have you never read in the Scriptures:

*It was the stone rejected by the builders
that became the keystone.
This was the Lord's doing
and it is wonderful to see?*

I tell you then, that the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit.'

Reflect

Spend a few moments in quiet reflection

Comment

An invitation to listen

The parable begins with an invitation to listen: Listen to another parable (v.33). Jesus draws the attention of the leaders of the people to the parable He is about to proclaim. This is an imperative, "listen", which does not exclude a certain threat if we look at the way the parable ends: "I tell you, then, that the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit" (v.43). On the other hand, Jesus explains the parable of the sower to his disciples without any sign of reproach (Mt 13:18).

What is the explanation of this invitation to listen, which is a little menacing? The answer is to be sought in the economic conditions of Palestine in the 1st century A.D. Big lots of land belonged to liberal foreigners who rented land in groups. The renting agreement provided

that part of the harvest would go to the owner, who carried out his right by sending stewards to collect his share. In such a situation one can understand that the feelings of peasants were sorely tried. They felt greatly disheartened and this sometimes led to revolt.

In his parable, Jesus refers to this concrete situation but takes it to a higher level of understanding. The situation becomes a compendium of the story of God and his people. Matthew invites the reader to read the parable in a symbolic sense. The “owner” is the figure of God and the vineyard is Israel.

The careful care of the owner for his vineyard (v.33)

First there is the initiative of the owner who plants a vineyard. Matthew uses five verbs to describe this attention and care: planted... fenced... dug... built... leased. After he had planted the vineyard, the owner leases it to those concerned and then goes abroad.

The many attempts of the owner to retrieve the fruits of the vineyard (vv.34-36)

In the second scene, the owner twice sends his servants who, charged with the task of retrieving the produce of the vineyard, are ill treated and murdered. This aggressive and violent action is described with three verbs: thrashed... killed... stoned... (v.35). By sending many more servants and by intensifying the ill treatment suffered, Matthew means to allude to the history of the prophets who were also similarly ill treated. We recall some of these: Uriah is killed by a sword (Jer 26:23); Jeremiah was fettered (Jer 20:2); Zachary was stoned (2 Chr 24:21). We may find a resume of this part of history of the prophets in Nehemiah 9:26: “they have killed your prophets...”

Finally he sent his son

The reader is invited to recognize in the son, who is sent “finally”, the one sent by God to whom respect is due and to whom the produce of the vineyard is to be delivered. This is the owner’s last attempt. The term “finally” defines the son as the Messiah. It is also possible that this view of eliminating the son may be modeled on another story from the OT: Joseph’s brothers who say: “Come on, let us kill him and throw him into one of the cisterns here!” (Gen 37:20).

The parable reaches its dramatic peak with the outcome of the son’s mission who is killed by the leasing vine-dressers so that they may take over the vineyard and usurp the inheritance. Jesus’ fate is set side by side with that of the prophets, but as son and heir, superior to them.

There is a detail at the end of this parable that we must not overlook. By placing the words, “they threw him out” followed by, “they killed him”, Matthew decidedly alludes to the passion of Jesus where He is taken out to be crucified.

Leasing the vineyard to other tenants (v.42-43)

The end of the parable confirms the loss of the kingdom of God and the giving of the kingdom to another people capable of bearing fruit. A people that is capable of a living an active faith and a practical love. The expressions “I tell you, then...will be taken...and will be given...” show the solemnity of God’s action marking the history of ancient Israel and of the new people.

Final Prayer

Lord, you, have always been merciful, help us fight our inflexible hardness towards others. With the Psalmist, we too pray, “Do not forsake the vineyard you have planted”. After this encounter with your Word, may our prayer become an ever more penetrating plea so that it may touch your heart: “Raise us up again Lord, show us your face and we shall be saved”.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.