

**Thirteenth Sunday of Matthew****26 August, 2018**

Father Filip Lommaert

In the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit, one God.

In today's Gospel reading, the Lord tells us a parable about a landowner who had workers looking after his vineyard. When the grapes were ready he wanted the fruit to be collected and sent his servants to get it.

The workers beat and killed whoever he sent. And even when the landowner sent his own son, they also killed him.

Of course, in this parable, Christ our God was referring to the religious and political leaders who so often rejected and killed the prophets that God had sent in the Old Testament. And, this is also how they responded to the Son of God. They refused to accept His teachings and handed him over to the Romans so He could be killed on a cross.

Christ told this parable to the high priests and Pharisees. Salvation did not come to the world through their hypocritical distortion of the Law of Moses or through ritual sacrifices in the Temple.

Instead, the One they rejected became the chief cornerstone, the very foundation of a new kingdom in which Jew, Gentile, male, female, rich, poor, young, old, slave, and free would know the blessing of life eternal, through the mercy and grace of Jesus Christ. Yes, this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes.

But, we should not rush and be tempted to condemn the Pharisees and Sadducees for their blindness and pat ourselves on the back because we believe in the Gospel. Without wanting to admit to it, too many today, still act very much like those Pharisees and Sadducees did in the time of Jesus Christ.

And many of those people today will quickly protest and say: "But, we believe He is the Son of God. We do not seek to kill Him. We do not say that He is evil".

The problem here is that too often, we still do not truly accept Him as the cornerstone, as the very foundation of who we are.

So let us forget now about how the Jewish leaders rejected the Messiah two thousand years ago and think about how we reject Him today, and every day.

"From those to whom much is given much is expected". What do these few words tell us? They tell us that we have been given far more than even the most righteous person of the Old Testament. They also tell us that God expects much more of us.

When Christ explained the Old Testament law to His disciples in His 'Sermon on the Mount', He demanded that they be more righteous than the religious leaders of their day. And, since those religious leaders were sticklers for following all the details of the law and interpreting them very strictly, you can imagine that the disciples were not very happy to hear this.

Our Lord Jesus Christ was not interested in the kind of outward righteousness of the religious leaders. What He was interested in was not the strict following of laws. He was interested in the hearts of people, and who people really were. "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God."

Jesus told them that, to obey the law, was not enough.

"Thou shall not kill."

Instead, He wanted His followers to root out the cause of murder from their hearts. He wanted them to give up anger, insults, and hatred.

"Thou shall not commit adultery."

It was not enough for them not to cheat on their spouses. They were to eliminate lust from their hearts.

It was not enough for them to demand "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth" from those who wronged them. They were to turn the other cheek, to love, to forgive, to be like God in showing mercy to the just and the unjust.

In fact, what He wanted and expected of them was that they should become as perfect as their Father in heaven.

The whole point here is that if we consider our faith as just a set of laws to obey we will end up rejecting Jesus Christ as the cornerstone of our lives.

He is not just the teacher of a code of conduct, of a set of rules. He is the foundation of our life. He goes to the heart. We are His temple and our life is in Him.

Whenever we refuse to accept the new and glorious life that He has given us, it is not just something that affects us. No. It means that we reject Him, and we turn away from our true selves and our only hope.

When that happens, we are just like a building without a solid foundation. This puts us in a very dangerous situation. For apart from the mercy of Christ, we have nothing, not even the Old Testament law.

So, what do we have to do? We must constantly purify our hearts, minds, and souls. We must remove from our lives every thought, word, and deed that is not holy, that does not belong in a temple.

Anything that does not fit squarely on the foundation of Jesus Christ has no place in us.

By means of prayer, fasting, forgiving those who wrong us, helping the poor, guarding our thoughts, and fighting our passions, we will gain the clarity that we need, the clarity to sort out the holy from the unholy in our hearts and lives.

And by being nourished by our Lord's Body and Blood in the Holy Eucharist, and by receiving His forgiveness through Confession, we will find new strength to embody the righteousness of Christ as we go through each day.

As we enter into the offering of the Eucharist, let us now truly lift up our hearts, and commend ourselves and each other, and all our life unto Christ our God.

And as we begin a new week, let us actually live the way Christ wants us to live, and let us go through our daily routines and shine forth with the glory of the true temple built squarely upon the one true foundation, the cornerstone, our Lord God and Saviour Jesus Christ.

To do anything less is to reject Him, just as surely as the corrupt religious leaders of old did.  
Amen.