



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

## 27th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year A

### ***The Ungrateful Tenants***

*Readings: Isaiah 5: 1-7, Ps 80. Philippians 4: 6-9, Matthew 21: 33-43*

One of the things that puzzles me most is the popular misconception of Jesus both within and without the Church. There is a tendency to sanitise Jesus, to neutralise Him, to misunderstand the gravity of what He does, to downplay the reality of who He is and to emasculate His teaching to fit in with our own conveniences. Instead of the Christ, The Eternal Word of God, The Second Person of the Trinity, The Divine Wisdom enfleshed, we are treated to a picture of a ninnyish counterfeit whose take on the world is not too different from our own and who exists to pat us on the head and bleat 'Never mind' whenever things go wrong. Who would follow such a creature?

Although I do not share the wilder eccentricities of the visionary and poet William Blake, there is much in his infamous broadside poem, 'The Everlasting Gospel' that's rings uncomfortably true.

Blake fulminates against those who have 'captured Jesus' and preserved Him in social aspic thus:

'If he had been Antichrist, creeping Jesus,  
He'd have done anything to please us.'

The remedy for this false picture of, the accommodating and impotent Christ, what I call, for shorthand, 'Fluffy Jesus', is to read the book. The Holy Scripture permits us no such deadly dilution or denial.

I preface this morning thus because today's Gospel is yet another terrifying picture of the world through God's eyes. Here is no story of comfort but a stark reminder of God's omnipotence and generosity and Man's reckless contempt and ingratitude.

The Landowner prepares the perfect 'let'. The Vineyard, the well, the winepress, all in order. The Tenants, lucky us, walk into a dream rental.

How rapidly we forget that this is a leasehold. We are temporary. We begin to act as if this is our own and we are permanent. We exercise dominion as if we were the worst kind of landlord. We pretend that the Landlord doesn't really exist. We rip up the title deeds. We change from thankful people to resentful people. We beat away those messengers of the Landlord who have the temerity to come reminding us of our dues and obligations. Lastly, when the Son comes, the Landlord assumes His honourable treatment, no such humility or penitence prevails. Rather we see how ingratitude and impenitence leads inexorably to an unspeakable act of violence and terminal rebellion. So twisted have the tenants become that they seriously believe that they will now inherit. So self-deceiving that they brutally reject the very source of their wellbeing and bounty. It is, like so many of Jesus' stories, a terrifying picture of the reality of

Man's rejection of God.

In this story Jesus, of course, refers to the prophets (the servants of God) and Himself (the Son). He then asks the question. 'What will the Landlord do about these appalling tenants?'

The answer is not slow in coming. We would all subscribe to it. The landlord will bring these bad men to a bad end – total destruction. Furthermore, He will lease the vineyard to other tenants who will produce the fruit.

This is an uncomfortable story for all of us – not just the out and out rejecters of the Landlord but also for those of us who are expected to produce the fruit in due season, the best of the crop.

We are, of all men, the most fortunate. WE have, as the Church, been given the lease of the vineyard. Woe betide us if we take it for granted, assume our right to permanence, reject the Word of God or amend it to suit, and murder the Son by misrepresentation and malfeasance. Once we start behaving as if we are not tenants but freeholders, that we are hereby right rather than by gift and mercy, the road to rejection and ruin looms large. Mercifully we are given the way to salvation. We are daily offered the twin remedies for human hubris and self- righteousness of the human heart in thanksgiving and penitence. These are contained within the Mass and the Confessional. These are the places that keep us focussed on the benevolence of God and our place in the order of things. A penitent heart is a place of regular encounter with the reality of who God is

and who we are. A thankful heart is never bitter or deformed by envy or vanity, but open, joyful, loving and fruitful, eager to pay our dues and offer Him our very best. The more we use these gifts, the more fruitful we will become. The alternative doesn't bear thinking about.