

Matthew 21:33-46

'Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a watch-tower. Then he leased it to tenants and went to another country. When the harvest time had come, he sent his slaves to the tenants to collect his produce. But the tenants seized his slaves and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. Again he sent other slaves, more than the first; and they treated them in the same way. Finally he sent his son to them, saying, "They will respect my son." But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, "This is the heir; come, let us kill him and get his inheritance." So they seized him, 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 said to him, 'He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the harvest time.'

Jesus said to them, 'Have you never read in the scriptures:

"The stone that the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone;
this was the Lord's doing,
and it is amazing in our eyes"?

Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom. The one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and it will crush anyone on whom it falls.'

When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they realized that he was speaking about them. They wanted to arrest him, but they feared the crowds, because they regarded him as a prophet.

A little boy went over to a pastor's house, where the pastor was doing some carpentry in his garage. The boy simply stood there and watched him for quite a long time. The preacher wondered why this boy was watching him and was finally so curious that he stopped and said, "Son, are you trying to pick up some pointers on how to build something?"

The little boy replied, "No. I am just waiting to hear what a pastor says when he hits his thumb with a hammer."

Our theme today is striving to produce good fruit in our lives. In both the first reading a Gospel, the vineyards failed to produce fruit and it didn't go well for them.

In the NT the fruits of the Holy Spirit are listed in Galatians 5:22. It says: "The Fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, Patience , kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control ."

Unfortunately we are seeing less and less of the fruits of the Holy Spirit in our society. As you know, last Sunday a gunman in Los Vegas killed 58 people and wound hundreds others in another senseless act of violence. The worst mass shooting in US history.

One author wrote: "When I was about ten years old, I received a ten-gallon aquarium for Christmas. I eagerly read the book that came with it and set about to create the perfect aquatic environment. I assembled the filter, washed the gravel, bought the plants and fish. Everything was prepared as well as it possibly could have been.

What I did not realize was that some snails had smuggled themselves in with the plants. They soon overran the environment. So did a few guppies the girl next door brought over. Worse, no matter how diligently I fed the fish, they seemed to prefer to eat each other. Within a few months, the aquarium was disassembled and placed in the garage.

Humanity seems to have a similar problem the fish had.

The root of violence is *the illusion of separation*—from God and from one another and from all of creation. Growing is an authentic relationship with God also means growing in an awareness a connection with everything in creation and most of all other people.

When you don't have a sense of being connected with God and one another, you have lost touch with the Mother Ship (as they would say in Star Wars) and things don't go well.

Contemplation of the Gospel message gradually trains us to not make so much of our differences. Our true selves are always beyond any nationality, religion, skin color, gender, sexuality, or any other possible labels. The Gospel creates a sense of unity with others and a sense of enchantment with all of creation -- A sacredness that the secular eye often misses. Authentic spirituality leads to unity rather than separation.

The only violence we can control is our own. Our own violent thoughts, words and actions.

The reflection I'm about to read is meant for ourselves. It calls us to be honest and take a look deep into our souls and realize there is where violence lives and there is where it is defeated.

If you would like, close your eyes and

Picture yourself before the crucified Jesus and recognize that he became what we are all afraid of and what we all deny: nakedness, exposure, vulnerability and failure. He became “sin” to free us from sin. He was the Scapegoat who reveals our worst and best souls to those who will gaze long enough.

He became the image of what humans do to humans—so we could see it clearly with the curtain of denial withdrawn. He became the crucified so we would stop crucifying. He became the crucified who refused to crucify back, and thus he stopped the inevitable pattern of death.

Jesus on the cross appeals to all of us to see ourselves—and God—as the victims of human cruelty.

JESUS SAYS TO US: “My people, I am yourself. I am your beauty. I am your goodness which, in your sin, you try to destroy. I am what you’re afraid of, your deepest and your best and most naked self.

Your badness largely consists in what you do to goodness, your own and others. You are afraid of the good. You are afraid of me. You kill what you should love. You hate and fear the very thing that could and will transform you.

AND NOW WE SPEAK BACK TO JESUS: “Lord Jesus crucified, you are my life. And you are also my death. You are my beauty. You are my full self. You are everything I want, and you are everything I am afraid of. You are everything I desire, and you are everything I deny. You are my ignored and neglected soul.

Lord Jesus, your love is what I most fear. I can’t let anybody love me ‘for nothing.’ I want to be worthy. Unearned intimacy with you or anyone terrifies me.

I am beginning to see that I, in my own body, am an image of what is happening everywhere. I want it to stop here, today. I want to stop the violence toward myself, toward the world, toward anybody, toward creation and toward you, my crucified Lord.

I do not ever again need to create a victim of anybody. Neither do I need to play the victim. You have shown me a truly new way.

You alone, Lord Jesus, refused to be crucifier, even at the cost of being crucified. You never play the victim, you never ask for vengeance, but you only breathe forgiveness, while we, on this fearful earth murder, mistrust, attack and hate. Now I see that it is not you that humanity hates; we hate ourselves, but mistakenly kill you.

I must stop crucifying your blessed flesh on this earth and in my brothers and sisters, and in every form of life. We are all your blessed Body, and you have always loved me precisely in my unworthiness. How can I not do the same for others? Now I see that you live in me and I live in you. You are inviting me out of this endless cycle of illusion and violence.

You are saving me. In your perfect and patient love you have chosen to enter into union with me. I do not pretend to understand. I can only receive you, trust you and thank you forever. I am your dwelling place. You have chosen to abide with me much more than I have ever chosen you, and I am sorry.

I thank you, Lord Jesus, for becoming a human being so I do not have to pretend or try to be a God. I thank you, crucified God, for becoming mortal, so I do not have to try to make myself immortal. I thank you, Lord Jesus, for becoming inferior so I do not have to pretend that I am superior to anyone.

I thank you for being crucified outside the walls, for being expelled and excluded like the sinners, so you can meet me where I feel that I am, always outside the walls of holiness.

I thank you, Lord Jesus, for being all of the things that humanity despises and fears, so I can accept myself and others in you. So I can love in you that very part of me that I don't like.

Crucified Jesus, I thank you for becoming a human being. Help me to be like you - A light in the darkness.

Amen.

(Copies next to baptistery)

(From "Hope Against Darkness" by Richard Rohr.)