

CHOSEN BY GOD, EXPECTED TO BEAR FRUIT

Have you ever poured out your heart to someone, been well received, and later been utterly rejected? Or have you ever loved someone so dearly and later was indignantly rejected?

That is very sad indeed. An experience like this can help us appreciate this weekend's liturgy. It speaks about God's wonderful love for His people and our failure to respond positively. The image of the vineyard shows how important we are to Him and how much He has invested to make us fruitful. But history shows humankind often fails to respond.

In Isaiah, God sings a love song about His vineyard. He cleared the stones, planted the choicest vine, built a watchtower, and hewed a winepress. He did everything. He left nothing undone.

That vineyard is us. God chose us. He cleared us through Baptism, planted us in the Church, protects us with providence, nourishes us with Word and Eucharist. We did not choose Him, He chose us.

But then the painful line: "He looked for grapes, but it yielded wild grapes" (Is 5:2). Jesus completes it: The owner sends servants for his fruits, but tenants beat them. He sends his son, and they kill him. Love was met with ingratitude.

The Fathers saw ourselves in this. St. Augustine says: "God planted you as a choice vine. Why have you become wild? The fault is not in the Farmer, but in the field." St. Gregory warns: "The vineyard brings forth wild grapes when a Christian confesses faith with his lips but denies it by his life."

God's choice of us demands a return. Not because He needs it, but because love must bear fruit.

What fruits does the Master seek? Not leaves — just coming to Mass or answering "Catholic" on a form. He seeks real fruits: a forgiving heart at home, honesty at work, service in the parish, prayer in our homes, care for the poor.

Many are experts at receiving from the vineyard but poor at returning to the owner.

In this week let us sincerely ask ourselves: If God visits His vineyard — my life, my marriage, my ministry — what will He find? Wild grapes of complaint, or sweet grapes of love?

The good news is, he has not cut down the vineyard. He still waits and still sends His Son in this Eucharist, giving another chance. As St. John of the Cross says: "At the evening of life, we shall be judged on love."