

(Last week, October 7-8, we celebrated the Feast of Mary, Mother of the Church, which was the focus of the homilies in our Diocese. Because of its excellent content, making it worthy of our reflection, I have asked Fr. Seán Loomis to share in writing his homily from the same weekend, but with a different perspective as Father Loomis is a Priest of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia.)

"The first striking aspect to this parable of the vineyard is the great care the owner takes in preparing it. He plants the vineyard with his own hands, carefully places a hedge around it for protection against enemies, digs a wine press in it and builds a tower. Although these responsibilities fell to the tenants, the owner did them out of the generosity of his heart. In fact, by the time the tenants arrived, the *only* thing asked of them was simply to take care of the vineyard and make it fruitful, knowing, one day, the owner would return to collect its produce.

Of course, the owner of the vineyard is God. All this work, this entire labor of love, is the creative act of God, the eternal Gardener. The same God who gave the vineyard of Eden to its first two tenants, is the same God who led the Jews out of Egypt into the new vineyard of the Holy Land. To the Jews, He gave the Law and built a city, which served as the hedging protecting them from dangers both moral and political. He built them a temple (the tower) and prepared for them an altar (the wine press) with one simple expectation: they bear the fruit of holiness and obedience. Why? So they could be slaves once more? No, rather, that their hearts might love Him and prove ready to receive His Son who, like the parable, alone possesses the owner's inheritance and desires to share it with them...the inheritance of eternal life. Instead, however, they chose the route of mutiny, choosing to kill each of the prophets God sent them. Even now, the Son Himself stands before them, inheritance in hand, with one final invitation, but they kill Him too, thinking in doing so they'd receive His inheritance...and *they were wrong*.

As the parable goes, the time of judgment comes. The owner takes away the vineyard and gives it to another...and so God did. Consider this: where are the temple and altar now? Destroyed. Not one stone upon another remains except one section of the outer wall...a relic of former glory. Much of the Holy Land now belongs to the Muslims and, shortly after Christ's death, the Romans wiped out the nation of Israel with such force that their cohesive identity disintegrated entirely. Above all, however, the beloved covenant was taken and given to the Christians. *Not the beatitude they expected*.

This history, however, should hit us close to home. We too once lived under an oppressive government, England, until God gave us *this* vineyard of America to call home. Like the Jews, we too left that oppressive government; they crossed the desert and we crossed the ocean. Like them, we flourished. God gave us a law unlike any other law, the Constitution, which remains the first of its kind. A law, moreover, built upon Christian beliefs, the most fundamental of which is in a Creator from Whom flows every right and liberty we hold dear as American citizens. God then gave us churches and the freedom to worship in them, and we stood as a city verdant in faith and virtue, a pillar of light to other nations.

Reflecting on this experience, Founding Father and President of the United States James Madison says, "When we view the blessings with which our country has been favored, those which we now enjoy, and the means which we possess of handing them down unimpaired to our latest posterity, our attention is irresistibly drawn to the source from whence they flow. Let us then, unite in offering

our most grateful acknowledgments for these blessings to the Divine Author of All Good.” *Here, speaks a good tenant of the vineyard, one who bears the heart of its Owner.*

More forcefully, Benjamin Franklin says again, “I do not believe that the Constitution was the offspring of inspiration, but I am as satisfied that it is as much the work of Divine Providence as any of the miracles recorded in the Old and New Testament.” The question for us, then, as the current tenants of this vineyard bears asking; *what will happen when God comes to collect the fruit?* What will He find? A nation that looks, not to God, but the NFL as a moral compass, the very institution whose players average an arrest every 7 days? Parents who provide their children with hormonal treatments to change their sex, even before puberty? Violent race riots destroying towns and businesses, both public and private? Neo-Nazis, the KKK, and alt-right groups marching down the streets of Charlottesville? The unabashed calling for the murder of our police? Mass shootings, such as Las Vegas, or the heralding of the death of innocent children as a right?

Right now, throughout the nation, the community drowns in heated argumentation. News outlets, talk shows, social media, family meals, erupt in heated argumentation about various legal and moral issues as we scramble as a nation to restore our country to greatness, but one thing is missing. While most focus the debate upon altering this or that particular law, none of these debates recognize that *every* good law stands upon one *eternal* law, God. And yet, we’ve kicked God out of our schools, our meetings, our sports, and even our conversations, making Him a taboo subject of discourse. How then, can we as a community, wonder why the vineyard hastens into chaos? Did not Jesus say that He is the vine, we are the branches, and apart from him we can bear no fruit? (see John 15:5) If fruit is what God *wants*, then the most practical thing we can do is not change a law, but change our hearts, and *return to God*.

Benjamin Franklin said, “The great enemy of the salvation of man, in my opinion, never invented a more effective means of limiting Christianity from the world than by persuading mankind that it was improper to read the Bible at schools.” Already, at the vineyard’s incipiency, a Founding Father recognized the danger of removing God from our culture, and that such danger dwelt not far off. In fact, Franklin went further when he said, “The *only* means of establishing and perpetuating our republican forms of government is the universal education of our youth in the *principles of Christianity* by means of the Bible,” (emphasis mine). If we want this country to change, and I know I do, the answer is simple: *pick up your Bible*. Learn it, know it, and don’t *ever* apologize for it. Teach the Word of God to your children and share it with others. Then, this country will bear the fruit God intended, and this vineyard will *not* be given to another.”

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