

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost
October 5, 2014

+

In the Bible the single most common description of the Church is as a *vineyard*. In the Old Testament the prophet Isaiah refers to the Church as “the planting of the Lord.” It was planted with the choicest vine by His Own Hand. There are numerous references to the Church as a vineyard in the Psalms and in Jeremiah. In the New Testament there are the memorable parables of the vineyard in the teaching of Our Lord Jesus. These stories include today’s gospel, the parable of the wicked tenants.

The history of God’s dealings with mankind has a theme of *covenant and church*. “I will be your God and you will be My *people*.” Notice it is not “you will be my *person*.” Almighty God tells us each soul is precious to Him. Our Lord tells us He goes after lost souls to find them. But all souls are intended by God to be *His people*, His Church, a visible Church. At first, this church was ancient Israel. After Israel rejected God’s Own Son, a new covenant was made and ratified in the Precious Blood of the Son. This new covenant Church is called *catholic* because she proclaims the whole truth and faith in Jesus Christ, Who is God’s complete Word. As *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* says, “In Christ God has said *everything*.”

It is crucial that we who enjoy all the privileges of The Catholic Church rightly understand the relationship. We are to understand the claims of God and His expectations. There *are* expectations! Today’s parable reveals there are expectations. “Who plants a vineyard and eats not the fruit thereof?” Almighty God established the Church for Himself. He furnished her with all things necessary for the welfare of her members. Why do we say the Church contains all things necessary to salvation? The answer is God Himself planted the vineyard. He not only *possesses* it, He *designed* it and *formed* it. Any of Isaiah’s hearers, or those who heard Our Lord’s parables, would understand it takes a great deal of planning, time, effort, cost, and care, to establish and maintain a vineyard. This means the doctrine, discipline, and worship, of The Catholic Church are not take-it-or-leave-it cooked-up options, but given by God that you and I may flourish as His beloved children.

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius

A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost

October 5, 2014

+

It is for that reason the parable says God *hedged* His vineyard about. The world produces weeds and thorns and bramble. God's Church exists in that world, by His favor, but He separates her out and distinguishes her by the very fact of His arbitrary revelation. And *His revelation is quite arbitrary*. "My ways are not your ways, says the Lord."

It is possible to get *beyond* the hedge and *out* of the vineyard. The Church, of necessity and design, has *boundaries*. It is possible to go out of bounds. Boundaries are a sign of God's special protection. Think of that seven-year crib your parents bought soon after you were born. Every night when they put you to bed they put up the side railings. It was a sign of their love. So too with the Church. It is not that Almighty God wants anybody outside His Church. When Malcolm Muggeridge, before his conversion, told Mother Teresa, "Come on now, Mother, Almighty God needs a few good men outside His Church," her reply was, "No. He doesn't!" Holy Scripture tells us God has no interest in the death of a sinner but that he should turn from his sin and be saved. Our call to one and all is: "*Come inside.*" God's Church exists for just that purpose. And it is a sign of His love that The Catholic Church has boundaries.

Finally, who can avoid the very obvious part of the parable telling us God looks for a return on His investment? Many people wonder anxiously about a return on their money. After all, we make an investment in order to have a return on it one day. That is a reasonable expectation. It is no different with Almighty God. From those who enjoy the use of the vineyard the landowner looks for fruit. It is not an up-front deposit He demands. It says, "He waited until the season drew near." Our Heavenly Father is not hasty. Thank God He is not hasty! *He waits to be gracious*. He gives us time to benefit from all the provisions He has lavished on His Church. But then the harvest does come. And nothing is more reasonable than we who have the privileges of the visible Church should make a return for all we have been given.