Homily for OTA27 2017

Like last week, today’s parable is addressed to the priests and elders. Those who held recognised, not self-appointed, positions of authority and influence. Positions that imply responsibility for others not self-aggrandisement.

As the parable reminds us, those entrusted with authority hold it on trust. For the vineyard is an established symbol of the entire people of Israel; rescued from slavery and planted in a fertile land where those who lead them (the tenants of the parable) are supposed to care for, nurture and bring to fruition, all that God has laboured for.

But the tenants in the parable; rather like Adam and Eve in that other place of fruitfulness, the Garden of Eden; have other ambitions.

Not content with being loved by God, they plot and scheme for an impossible parity. They have had a taste of power and they want more.

As Lord Acton famously observed: “power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” He adds “History has proven that… where you have a concentration of power in a few hands, all too frequently men with the mentality of gangsters get control.”

This is the scene described in the parable where the level of violence escalates as the tenants’ thirst for power increases. Tragedy always ensues when civil authorities turn their weapons on their own people.

But enough of those who take advantage of others, Jesus pronounces their fate; they have no divine right to enjoying the fruits of the kingdom.

Jesus’ concern is not with their vanities; the kingdom always priorities the humble and the poor. So I want to turn our attention to how generous and forgiving the victims of poverty and violence can be.

And the example I want to quote was found alongside the body of a dead child at Ravensbruck concentration camp:

*O Lord, remember not only the men and woman of good will, but also those of ill will. But do not remember all of the suffering they have inflicted upon us:*

*Instead remember the fruits we have borne because of this suffering—our fellowship, our loyalty to one another, our humility, our courage, our generosity, the greatness of heart that has grown from this trouble.*

*When our persecutors come to be judged by you, let all of these fruits that we have borne be their forgiveness.*

In God’s kingdom those who hold the real power know where it comes from and how to express it. To pray for persecutors, as Jesus also did on Calvary, is not to disregard their crimes but to transcend them with love. It is the kind of miraculous harvest that can only come from hearts disposed to goodness, beauty and truth.

© pcm 2017