



**Welcome to St. Olympia Orthodox Church,
a young and, God willing, growing community of worshippers.**

**Our priest is Fr. Peter Irfan, Acting Rector.
You may reach him at 716-342-8520 (cell) or at fatherpeter777@yahoo.com.**

**Please join us for prayer and fellowship.
Divine Liturgies are held every Sunday at 10 am.
Great Vespers are held every Saturday evening at 5 pm.**

Next Services

Saturday, September 1st

**Great Vespers
5:00 pm**

*Fr. Peter is available to hear
confessions before Vespers
by appointment.*

Sunday, September 2nd

**Matins
8:45 am**

**Divine Liturgy
10:00 am**

Fellowship to follow

at

**St. Olympia Chapel
123 Main Street
Potsdam, NY**



Forty-Day Blessing

This coming Sunday, September 2nd, we will celebrate the forty blessing of the newest member of our parish, baby Alexander, and his mother, Jessica Gurrea. The Church invites every Orthodox mother and new-born baby to personally commemorate an event in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ and his mother, Mary, the Theotokos: the Presentation of our Lord to the Temple. Below is one of the prayers that is read:

O Lord our God, Who on the fortieth day was brought as a child into the Temple of the Law by Mary, the Virgin Bride and Your holy Mother, and was carried in the arms of the righteous Symeon, do You also, Sovereign Master All-Powerful, bless this presented babe that it may appear before You, the Creator of all things. And do You increase in him (her) every good work acceptable to You, removing from him (her) every opposing might by the sign of the likeness of Your Cross; for You are He Who guards infants, O Lord. So that, accounted worthy of holy Baptism, he (she) may obtain the portion of Your Elect of the Kingdom, being protected with us by the Grace of the Holy Consubstantial and Undivided Trinity. For unto You do we send up Glory, Honor and Worship, with Your Eternal Father and Your All-Holy, Good and Life-creating Spirit, both now and ever, and to the ages of ages. Amen.

Please join us for this beautiful liturgical welcome of baby Alexander "into the midst of the congregation."

13th Sunday after Pentecost

Matthew 21:33-42

*Note: the following article has been written by an anonymous contributor.
It is included here by permission.*

In today's Gospel, Matthew 21:33-42, we hear the parable of the vinedressers, which ends with our Lord quoting Psalm 118:23, "The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This was the LORD's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes." At one level, this parable is the history of our salvation and of how we Gentiles, once excluded from covenant relationship with God, are now the People of God. But this parable also pushes us to do what Ephesians 5:16 urges us to do, "redeem the time:" stop living on auto-pilot; stop sleepwalking our way to the grave; and start living intentionally, with mind and heart fully focused on and making the most of the opportunities which God provides for us and of the resources with which God equips us---because some of those opportunities are only once in a lifetime, and all opportunities eventually run out.

The Lord Jesus begins this parable with a man creating a vineyard. He plants a hedge of thorny bushes around it to protect it from wild animals who might snack on the grapes and from thieves who might steal the grapes. To make production of the wine easier, he also "dug a wine press in it," so the grapes could be pressed right on the spot instead of having to be hauled away somewhere else. For added convenience, the owner also "built a tower" in the vineyard, not only as vantage point for guards to watch for thieves, but also as a place for itinerant workers to sleep. This was a sweet set-up, which the landowner now leases to vinedressers, tenant farmers. Then the landowner goes off to "a far country."

Now understand: Jesus is not creating a new parable here; He's referencing a story with which the Jewish people in general and the religious leaders in particular were very familiar: the Song of the Vineyard from Isaiah 5, which speaks of God having "a vineyard on a very fruitful hill. He dug it up and cleared out its stones, and planted it with the choicest vine. He built a tower in its midst, and also made a wine press in it. So He expected it to bring forth good grapes, but it brought forth wild grapes," which were useless for eating and/or for making wine. Clearly, it's the story of Israel, delivered from the slavery of Egypt, brought to a fruitful Promised Land cleared of its pagan inhabitants, given every advantage to live well and live faithful to God, but ending up spiritually unfaithful and useless. Grieving, God asks, "What more could have been done to My vineyard that I have not done in it? Why then when I expected it to bring forth good grapes, did it bring forth wild grapes?" It's like the parent of a kid gone bad wondering if somehow they failed. But in the end, God holds His adult children responsible for their adult choices: "I will take away its hedge, and it shall be burned; and break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down. I shall lay it waste; it shall not be pruned or dug, but there shall come up briars and thorns. I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it." In both the prophecy and the parable, the landowner is God, the Creator and Lord of heaven and earth. The vineyard signifies the Hebrew people, whom God had chosen to be the bearers of salvation to all of humanity. The hedge around the vineyard is the law of God. The wine press is the promised Messiah. The tower signifies the Temple. And the vinedressers are the leaders of the people, the priests and the teachers. Every detail of both the prophecy and the parable has meaning, and the point is crystal clear.

But our Lord's adds a new element. Note how Jesus says that after the landowner "leased it to the vinedressers," he then "went into a far country." But how can God, Who is present everywhere, go off into a far country? Actually He doesn't go anywhere. But sometimes it feels like He does, right? Sometimes you and I think that God is far away, that we're hidden from His sight, that He doesn't know very clearly every single thought we think, that He doesn't hear every single word we say, that He doesn't watch every single deed we do, that He doesn't grasp every single emotion and/or passion we experience---and that therefore, because the cat's away, we mice can play. Otherwise, if we were really conscious of always walking in God's presence, we wouldn't make some of the sinful choices we make, not just because we'd be afraid of judgment, but because we'd be too ashamed to make those choices to God's face. When our Lord speaks of God going "into a far country," He's telling us that while God gives us the gifts of faith and grace by which we accept His offer of salvation, and while God supplies us with every grace we need to be faithful, nonetheless God also respects the free will He built into us and leaves it to us to do what Philippians 2:12 urges us to do: "work out [our] salvation with fear and trembling." At the same time, Jesus is telling us that God is patient with us in this process of being transformed, so that we might come to repentance because, as we're reminded later in 2 Peter 3:9 God is "patient toward us, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."

But God forces no one to be saved. The tenant farmers, quickly assumed that because the landowner was out of sight, the vineyard and its produce now belonged to them. When the landowner sent servants to collect the rent, the vinedressers "beat one, killed one, and stoned another," and kept doing the same to other of the landlord's servants. These servants were the prophets, whom God sent to the people of Israel to remind them of the fruits that flow from following the Law of God, but most of whom were rejected, even killed, because the people in charge, both political and religious, wanted to be "free" of both obedience and accountability to God.

And before we get too comfortable in our own righteousness, let's think, you and I, of how heedful you and I have been to the voices of those whom God has sent into our lives to speak forth His word and will to us: parents, pastors, teachers, the holy fathers, the teaching of the Church, the Scriptures themselves, friends, fellow believers, the voice of conscience. God is not silent to us; in fact, He never shuts up, never stops trying to lead us, teach us, persuade us, correct us. But do we listen? Or do we choose to beat up, kill off, or otherwise silence those voices, so that we too can be "free" of both obedience and accountability to God?

The parable next tells us that the landowner sends his son to the vinedressers because "They will respect my son." And this, too, is a new element; as it says in Galatians 4:4, "When the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son," not because God actually expected all Israel to respect and respond to the last appeal of love; God knew beforehand that the leaders of the people would treat His Son in the same Golgotha's hill, outside the gates of Jerusalem. But for those who would respond, God made His Son's death redemptive, the "propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world." However, before we breathe any sighs of relief, let's listen carefully to the grim warning in Hebrews 6:4-6 that if we fall away we "crucify again for [ourselves] the Son of God, and put Him to open shame." If, by outright apostasy or by remaining stubborn in grave sin, we're really denying Christ and rejecting His redeeming grace, we effectively crucify Him all over again and hold up His Cross to ridicule and contempt as something worthless.

For the vinedressers, the parable doesn't have a happy ending. Our Lord's listeners themselves admit that the landowner "will destroy those wicked men miserably, and lease his vineyard to other vinedressers who will render to him the fruits in their seasons." And so it happened. The New Covenant replaced the Old; the old temple was destroyed and the new temple of believers "as living stones are being built up a spiritual house;" and in Christ, "the Stone which the builders rejected" but now "the cornerstone," the Gentiles, once rejected and excluded, fulfill the prophecy in Hosea 2:23, "Then I will say to those who were not My people, 'You are My people!' and they shall say, 'You are my God!'"

But for us, the new tenants, as much as for the old, the landowner's demand is the same: to "render to Him the fruits in their seasons." As our Lord insists in John 15:16, "I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain." What fruit? Firstly, "fruit worthy of [in keeping with] the repentance," like prayer, fasting, ascetic struggle and Spirit-empowered growth of life. Secondly, "the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control...goodness, righteousness, and truth." And there's "the fruit of righteousness" which "is sown in peace by those who make peace." True, we can produce no good fruit unless we are good trees, by faith rooted in and nourished by Christ, and empowered by the Holy Spirit for growth and productivity. But is bearing good fruit that remains even on our to-do list? The vineyard has been leased out to you and to me. What kind of vinedressers are we?

Save the dates...

Vladyka Michael will visit our parish on the weekend of Nov. 17th-18th

...plan ahead!