

There is perhaps no greater danger to us in the spiritual life than the temptation to place our own will above the will of God. It is a temptation as old as humanity itself, reaching back to the Garden of Eden, when our first parents chose to trust their own judgment rather than obey the command of their Creator. And it is a temptation that continues to plague us today, even within the very walls of the Church. For it is one thing to reject God openly, to deny His existence or to refuse to acknowledge His authority. It is quite another, and perhaps far more insidious, to profess our love for God while quietly insisting that He conform Himself to our own expectations.

In today's first reading, the prophet Isaiah speaks of a vineyard into which the Lord has poured extraordinary care. He has prepared the soil, cleared away the stones, planted the finest vines, and provided everything necessary for a fruitful harvest. And yet, when the time comes to gather the fruit, the vineyard produces nothing but wild grapes. The Lord asks what more He could possibly have done for His vineyard.

He has given it everything, and yet it has failed to fulfill the very purpose for which it was created.

In the Gospel, Jesus presents us with an even more disturbing image. The owner of a vineyard entrusts it to tenants, expecting them to cultivate it and produce a harvest. But when he sends his servants to collect what is rightfully his, the tenants respond with violence. They beat some of the servants, kill others, and eventually murder the owner's own son, believing that by eliminating the rightful heir, they can claim the vineyard for themselves.

Consider the sheer arrogance of these tenants. They are not the owners of the vineyard. They did not plant it, they did not establish it, and they did not provide the means by which it flourishes. Everything they possess has been entrusted to them by another. And yet, they have become so consumed by their own desires that they have convinced themselves that they have the right to take possession of what does not belong to them. They have mistaken the privilege of stewardship for the

authority of ownership. And in doing so, they have placed themselves in direct opposition to the very master who gave them everything.

My dear brothers and sisters, this is not merely a story about the religious leaders who rejected Christ two thousand years ago; it is a warning to every one of us. For the same pride, the same selfishness, and the same rebellion that consumed those tenants can take root in our own hearts. We, too, can begin to believe that because God has entrusted us with certain gifts, responsibilities, or positions within His Church, we have somehow acquired the right to dictate how those things should be used. We can begin to confuse our own preferences with the will of God, our own opinions with the truth, and our own desires with what is best for the Church.

Perhaps the most dangerous aspect of this temptation is that it can disguise itself as righteousness. We can convince ourselves that our resistance is motivated by concern, that our stubbornness is a form of fidelity, and that our unwillingness to submit is somehow an expression of our love for the Church. But we must be very careful when we begin

to believe that our own judgment is more trustworthy than the wisdom of God, or that our personal preferences should take precedence over the authority He has established.

There is a profound difference between loving the Church and loving the Church on our own terms. There is a difference between being devoted to the faith and being devoted to the particular ways in which we have grown accustomed to practicing it. There is a difference between serving God and expecting God to serve our own expectations.

This is particularly important when we consider the virtue of obedience. In a world that increasingly regards personal autonomy as the highest expression of human freedom, obedience is often viewed with suspicion. We are encouraged to trust ourselves, to follow our own instincts, and to resist anything that might require us to surrender our personal preferences. But the Christian life is not founded upon the supremacy of our own will. It is founded upon the surrender of our will to God.

Consider Christ Himself. The eternal Son of God, through whom all things were created...He humbled Himself and became obedient to the Father, even unto death on a Cross. In the Garden of Gethsemane, confronted with the terrible suffering that awaited Him, He did not demand that the Father alter His plan to accommodate His own human desires. Rather, He submitted Himself entirely to the Father's will. And through that perfect obedience, Christ accomplished the salvation of the world.

If the Son of God Himself embraced such perfect obedience, what excuse can we possibly offer for our own disobedience? How can we claim to be faithful disciples of Christ while insisting that our own will must always prevail? How can we profess to love the Father while refusing to do what He commands?

This is not to say that every question, disagreement, or expression of concern is an act of disobedience. The Church has always recognized the importance of prudent judgment, legitimate discussion, and sincere efforts to understand the reasons behind her teachings and disciplines.

Questioning why we do what we do is never a bad thing, but there is a point at which honest questioning can morph into something less innocent...it can become an expression of our refusal to accept an answer we don't like...it can become a form of insistence that things be done according to our own wishes. When that happens, we must be willing to examine our consciences honestly; for beneath our objections, we may discover not a defense of the faith, but an attachment to our own pride.

The Sacred Liturgy is a particularly important example of this reality. The Mass is not ours to redesign; that power belongs only to the One to whom we offer our worship - God Himself. He built into the system He left behind a mechanism for making the changes He desires - the Magisterium of the Church...the teaching body comprised of the men He has called and endowed with His Holy Spirit. We are the recipients of what God establishes through them; our place is to become active participants in the liturgy they set forth - not its critics, not its editors, not its opposition. We have been entrusted with something

sacred, something that both precedes us, and will endure long after we are gone. Our responsibility is to receive it faithfully, to celebrate it according to the mind of the Church, and to pass it on intact to those who will come after us.

When we begin to insist that the Church must accommodate our personal preferences, we risk placing ourselves in the very position of the tenants in today's Gospel. We begin to act as though the vineyard belongs to us, as though we have the authority to determine its purpose...as though the Master must simply accept whatever harvest we choose to produce. But the vineyard does not belong to us. The Church does not belong to us. The Liturgy does not belong to us. All of these things belong to Jesus Christ, and we will ultimately be held accountable for how faithfully we have cared for what He has entrusted to us.

We do ourselves no favors if we deceive ourselves into believing that our good intentions will excuse our refusal to obey. The tenants may well have believed that they had legitimate reasons for keeping the vineyard for themselves. They may have convinced themselves that they

were entitled to its fruits. But their intentions did not change the reality of their disobedience. And neither will our own rationalizations change the reality of our choices when we knowingly place our will above the will of God.

St. Paul, in today's second reading, reminds us to bring our anxieties and concerns before the Lord in prayer, trusting that the peace of God will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. He calls us to fix our thoughts upon what is true, honorable, just, pure, and worthy of praise. This requires humility. It requires us to recognize that we do not possess all wisdom, that our understanding is limited, and that we are in constant need of God's guidance. Above all, it requires us to be willing to allow God to correct us, to challenge us, and, when necessary, to call us away from the things to which we have become excessively attached. For pride is not simply the refusal to acknowledge that we are wrong. It is the refusal to allow anyone, even God Himself, to tell us that we are wrong. And when pride takes root in the spiritual life, it can become an obstacle to grace, a barrier to conversion, and ultimately a danger to our

salvation. The person who is unwilling to submit his will to God leaves very little room for God to transform him.

We must never forget that the Lord is patient and merciful, but He is also just. The vineyard Isaiah described that failed to produce good fruit was left vulnerable to destruction. In the Gospel, Jesus makes it abundantly clear that the tenants who rejected the master's authority would lose the vineyard altogether. These are not empty warnings. They remind us that God's patience must never be mistaken for indifference, and His mercy must never be treated as permission to persist in disobedience.

One day, each of us will stand before the judgment seat of Christ. We will not be asked how successfully we imposed our own preferences upon the Church, how effectively we defended our personal traditions, or how often we persuaded others to agree with us. We will be called to account for how faithfully we loved God, how sincerely we obeyed His commandments, how humbly we served His Church, and how generously we bore fruit for His Kingdom.

May God deliver us from the sin of pride, from the selfishness that places our own desires above His commands, and from the arrogance that leads us to believe that we know better than the Master. May He grant us the humility to submit our wills to His, the courage to accept correction, and the grace to be obedient even when obedience is difficult or demands that we surrender something we hold dear.

We are not the masters of the vineyard. We are its servants. And when the Lord comes to seek the fruits of His labor, may He find in us not the bitterness of rebellion or the barrenness of pride, but the abundant harvest of faith, humility, charity, and obedience. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen!