



My Beloved Ones,

I greet you all with love and joy, as we prepare to come to the end of the summer season. I send my blessings to all the children and young people of our Metropolis of Atlanta, whether they are beginning their time in primary school, high school, or university.

Along with the conclusion of summer, very soon, the cooler weather that comes with fall makes us think also, of the harvest. Those fruits and crops which blossomed during the springtime of Pascha and grew under the warmth of the Apostles Fast will soon become fruit and grain to give nourishment and comfort.

It is therefore a blessing that this Sunday's Gospel reading is taken place in a vineyard. In our Lord's parable however, the tenants of the vineyard do not behave honorably in their work. When the owner of the vineyard wishes to inspect their works during the harvest, and receive the fruit that is rightfully His, He sends servants to represent Him. However, the tenants beat one, stone another, and kill the last. Again, the owner wishes to reach out to His tenants, and so He

sends more servants—but this shameful process of torture and death is repeated. Finally, the owner of the vineyard reasons that the tenants will respect His son, but when His son arrives, the tenants see a way to steal his inheritance, and so they murder Him as well.

The parallels of this parable were not clear to those with whom Christ was speaking. The vineyard, of course, is earth; the owner is God, and the tenants to whom He let out the property were the Israelites with whom He established His covenant. Just as the owner wished to see what His tenants had brought forth in the season of the harvest, God sent His servants, the Prophets, to speak His Word, so that faithful might bring forth good fruits. In the abuse and horrible mistreatment of all His messengers and His Son, Christ is criticizing the frequent rejection of God's Word—and predicting His own Crucifixion, as He is the Son of the Vineyard Owner.

While the people to whom He is speaking can grasp the meaning of the parable, they fail to understand their role in it as the wicked tenants. When He asks what the owner will do to the wicked tenants, the listeners correctly say that the owner will "*...put those wretches to a miserable death, and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons*" (Matthew 21:41). Christ ends His preaching quoting Psalm 118 which predicts that the rejected stone shall become the chief cornerstone, encouraging both the Israelites, and now the Gentiles to turn to Him.

My brothers and sisters, as we look to the coming harvest, I pray that we all take the time to examine what spiritual fruits we have produced for the Glory of God. The meaning of this parable was not simply historical, we too can reject our Creator's message; not only by disobeying His commandments, but also by failing to cultivate the Fruits of the Spirit. Christ makes it very clear that the gifts His Father bestowed to humanity can be easily taken from us and given to others who prove more worthy of them. As we approach the time of harvest let us work to insure that we will be able to give a good account to the owner of the Vineyard when He returns to receive His fruit.

+ALEXIOS
Metropolitan of Atlanta