

DEACON GEORGE'S HOMILY FOR 27th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Prophecy is like a health and safety warning:

"Don't go too near the edge or you will fall in."

"Don't stick your fingers in the electrical socket or you'll be electrocuted".

In the Old Testament, the Prophets' main task was to give warnings of what **will** happen, if you do not follow their instructions. And these instructions were what the prophets had received from God. In today's Liturgy of the Word, the Old Testament reading, the Psalm and the Gospel are all prophetic warnings.

In our first reading, Isaiah warns the Jewish nation that if they, (the vineyard), do not produce fruit, then, God is going to do away with his vineyard and lay waste to it. The prophecy came true.

They didn't bear fruit, and so, as prophesied, they ended up in exile in Babylon.

In the Gospel reading, Jesus tells the chief priests his prophecy. It is his own personal warning to them, in the form of a parable. In which the characters are as follows: the landowner is God, the vineyard is Israel, the tenants are the religious leaders, the servants are the prophets, and the son is Jesus Himself.

The Jewish nation was privileged, they were given a vineyard, with a fence, a wine press, and a tower. They had all that they needed, and it was provided for them by God. All God wanted in return, was for them to repay him, with some fruit.

God trusted them. He let them tend the land as they wanted, and he was patient with them, sending messenger after messenger, giving them chance after chance, to offer him some fruit. But now, this is their last chance, the landowner, namely God, has now sent his Son, **Jesus**, to collect fruit.

It is in this Gospel passage, that Jesus makes two very clear christological claims: That, **He**, Jesus of Nazareth, **is** the Son of God. Also. that He, Jesus, **is** the **cornerstone**, that was prophesied in Psalm 118, and in Isaiah chap 28. And this claim of Jesus, is also reiterated by St. Paul in his letter to the Ephesians, and by St. Peter in his first letter.

Now, Jesus goes on to prophesy their future. He says that **He**, the son, will be killed ... which is a direct reference to his forthcoming crucifixion. And that the vineyard will be taken from them.

And Jesus' prophecy **did** come true, Jesus **was** crucified, and the temple **was** taken from them. It was destroyed in 70 AD, and the Jews were dispersed from their land.

However, a **new** Temple was created, and given to a people who **would** provide fruit, the first Gentile Christians. And we are their successors, a people who will also produce fruit or **should** produce fruit. And the new Temple, is the Temple of the Holy Spirit, that lives in the hearts of all baptised Christians, **promised**, and **given** to us, by Jesus Christ, at our baptism.

Sadly, the Jewish leaders thought that **they**, as God's "chosen people", possessed the kingdom of God, but it was taken from them. Not because of what they **did**, but because of what they **didn't** do. They sat back, rested on their laurels, satisfied with themselves, because they were convinced that **they**, and only **they**, were "chosen people". They thought, "*that's it, were in, we've got the tick in the box ... there's nothing more we need to do*". But, they were **so wrong!**

Does this ring a bell with any of us? Do any of us believe, that because we are Catholics and come to Mass, that we are **in**, and we have obtained a divine **tick** in the box. Jesus has made it crystal clear, that it is by our fruit that we are assessed not our membership. Jesus expects fruit. And from history we have seen what happens when none, or very little fruit, is produced. **Fruit**, or lack of it is today's prophetic **warning!**

We may kid ourselves, but in 20 or 30 years' time, there **may** be, or may **not** be, a Church here in Kendal. There may be a Church building, but the Church ... the **people** ... may have gone.

Something needs to be done **now**. We can't sit back, like the "Chosen People" did and do **nothing**, thinking, "*don't worry, it'll be alright*", because it **won't** be alright". We need to bear fruit. That's today's prophecy.