

THE PARABLE OF THE VINEYARD

Matthew 21:33-42

“Be established in faith”

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(Based on a sermon by Metropolitan Hilarion Alfeyev)

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In the Old Testament Israel is often referred to as a vineyard. The tenants of the vineyard are the people of Israel, loved and chosen by God to be a light to the world. However, they succumbed to their passions and to sin, and failed in their sacred task. The Lord, not giving up on them, sent holy prophets to them with warnings of what they needed to do in order to correct their lives. Instead of listening and repenting, they treated the prophets with cruelty and even murder. Finally, the Lord sent His beloved Son to them. They didn't listen to Him either, and gave Him up to a terrible death.

This parable does not only have historical significance. Since the time of the coming into the world of our Savior, much of mankind has continued to return God's love and forgiveness with hatred. In Russia, the God-hating regime of the Bolsheviks tried to completely extinguish the flame of Christianity. Bishops, priests, monastics and lay people were murdered. Churches, monasteries, spiritual schools, and even cemeteries were blasphemed, disfigured, and destroyed. However, the elderly grandmothers (“babushki”) kept the light of Orthodox Christianity burning in their hearts. They secretly baptized their children and grandchildren, and they secretly taught their children to love Christ. These were very dark and violent times, but the Communists and the Soviets failed to extinguish the light of Christ, which continued to burn in the Russian land even until the collapse of the Communist God-hating regime.

People do not always respond to God's love with either hatred or faith. Sometimes people answer God's invitation to salvation with indifference. There is an attitude that says, “Whether or not God exists is not important. What is important is that our lives are prosperous and that we accumulate a lot of money.” These same people often say, “Don't speak with children about God. Let them grow up and then they can decide for themselves. You can believe in God or not — this is your personal business, and keep it to yourself.” This apathy and indifference, this tendency to create a world without spiritual or religious values, is just as destructive as the physical destruction of holy places and the murdering of Christians, because this attitude has a destructive influence on the soul, and this attitude kills the spirit.

Why is the horror of Columbine being repeated so many times? Why do so many young people feel the need to take opiates and other narcotics, in spite of the fact that so many of them are dying as a result? Why are so many young people dying by suicide? Why are so many young people engulfed by so many other vices? One reason is because they have no direction or purpose in life. They don't have any understanding of the reason for their very own existence. The human spirit is much richer, spacious and multi-faceted than people think, the same people who would deprive us of the kingdom of God. No matter how successful a person may be in his career, his spirit will have no rest until he finds the purpose of his life. Therefore, the deception which claims that it doesn't matter whether or not you believe in God, has a horrible and destructive influence on the spirit, especially on the spirits and souls of young adults and children.

What should be our answer to this atheistic ideology which is so popular in the modern secular world? St. Paul gives us the answer in his epistle which was read today: “Be watchful, be established in faith, be manly, be strong” (1 Cor. 16:13). Be established in faith, protect and preserve your faith, and hold your faith dear to your heart — namely, faith in God, faith in Christ, and faith in His Holy Church through which we are saved. Only faith can quench the hunger in our hearts, which every person experiences. Only faith, and nothing else, can help you to raise your children. Your future, and the the future of your progeny depend upon your

faith. Of what value is it to leave a large inheritance to your children if you do not pass on to them the true faith and help them to understand the purpose of life?

Let us listen to these words of the Lord as a warning to each of us. Let us pray that the Lord will help us to stand in the faith and to keep the faith. And let us pray that the faith that we received from our parents, or that we came to ourselves, or that the Lord Himself gave us, we would pass on to our children, to our neighbors, and to future generations. Amen.



Destroyed Christian cemetery in the Turkish occupied territory of Cyprus

