

DO WE REALLY LOVE JESUS?

Isaiah 5: 1-7 & Matthew 21:33-43

I feel so fortunate to have been brought up to learn who Jesus is, our God and our Saviour. I hope I can say that I love Him. I wish I could love Him more. I hope you feel the same way as I do. What I find incredible is the fact that so many people have rejected Him. When He was on this earth He spent all His time doing good and leading people on the road that led to Heaven and still He was rejected by some. I find it hard to believe that there were those who could not see the innate goodness in Jesus. Jesus must have been disappointed to see that all His efforts were wasted on some. This did not surprise Him. He was familiar with rejection. The history of His people was one long sad tale of infidelity to God.

Seven centuries earlier the prophet Isaiah was sent by God to bring His fickle and hard hearted people back to Him. Isaiah tried to do this by telling the story of a man who carefully prepared the soil and planted a vineyard. Naturally after all his hard and careful work he expected it to produce juicy grapes. Instead the vine bore sour grapes. His hearers agreed with him that they deserved to be uprooted. Isaiah pointed out the hard truth that they were those barren vine trees. God had wooed them and they had rejected Him.

In today's Gospel Jesus followed Isaiah's theme of a vineyard. In His story the vineyard was hired out to tenant farmers. His vineyard did produce a harvest. The owner of the vineyard sent two groups of his men to collect his share of the produce. These men represented the prophets of the Old Testament. They were either beaten or killed. As a last resort he sent his own dear son. Surely they will respect him? This was Jesus' subtle way of telling the leaders of God's people of His time that they were the ones who would one day be guilty of murdering God's Son. They realised the point Jesus was making and it made them furious and all the more determined to get rid of Him. Jesus was

telling them the truth about themselves and they did like what they heard, because the truth hurt them. If they took to heart what Jesus was telling them it would mean that they would have to change their lives.

When we have to face hard unpleasant truths, we do one of two things. Either we ignore and deny it. That is what some people do when they are told by their doctor that they have cancer. Or wise people take heed of what is said to them and accept the hard truth and place themselves completely in the hands of their doctor.

What about us? Have we accepted Jesus or rejected Him? We have to make a choice. We can't sit on the fence. Jesus told us we are either with Him or against Him. We might say about ourselves that there is no question of us rejecting Jesus. We go to Church every Sunday and receive Him in Holy Communion. Surely that is an indication enough that we have accepted Him? The leaders of Jesus' time could have made the same claim. They claimed to observe the Law of God to the letter. Yet Jesus pointed out to them in the words of Isaiah, "These people honour me with their lips but their heart is far from Me."

Is our love for Jesus superficial or real? If we take Jesus seriously we shall find that the demands and challenges He makes on us are exacting. For example, Jesus spent a lot of His time teaching us how we are to forgive when we are hurt. Jesus knew that forgiving our enemies is hard. Examine how we forgive others. Do we really forgive from our heart those who have hurt us, like our Heavenly Father forgives us? Or do we forgive grudgingly and in a supercilious fashion? Again, Jesus tells us that we are to take up our cross daily and follow Him. How do we carry our daily cross? Do we shy away from our cross? If we do carry it, is it done with moaning and groaning?

Are our lives constantly changing for the better or are we in a rut? Are we enthusiastic about following Jesus and accepting

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the guidance of His Church? Or do we interpret the rules of the Church our way? Do we love our faith and want to share what we have with those who are indifferent and godless? If we do not behave in these ways, then we are numbered among those who are against Jesus. Today Jesus is asking all of us to give deep consideration to what He means to us. Let our following of Him not just be words, but real and active.