

This is the second parable Jesus addresses to the chief priests and the elders of the Jewish people – who first approached him to question his teaching and authority.

Like the parable of the sons AA we heard last week – this is a story about smugness and the sense of entitlement. . . The reading from the Prophet Isaiah sets the stage for the parable – the vineyard is God's people. God has planted and tended them and wants them to bear fruit.

Jesus' contemporaries – the chief priests and the elders of the people – were NOT bearing fruit – That is, they were doing what they wanted to do – and not what God was calling them to do ---and so Jesus tells them this story to confront them with their irresponsibility – and to shake them out of their complacency.

The parable, of course, goes beyond the people of Jesus' day in its application – and the Church has preserved it for its challenge to people of every time and season. We, too, can become smug and self-satisfied. . . We, too, can fail to hear the word of God or accept the prophets God sends our way. . .

We can be smug as a nation. God has richly blessed us in the land of the free and the home of the brave. We can turn this into pride about our prosperity and our freedoms --- just as the chief priests and elders prided themselves on being God's chosen people.

It's then that we begin NOT to notice when we fall into racism, or buy into our consumeristic culture, or use our vast amounts of resources destructively – rather than constructively.

Sometimes we forget that the measure of the greatness of any society is how well it cares for the weakest and most vulnerable.

We can become smug and self-centered as a Church. We can pride ourselves on being the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church – and forget that as a pilgrim people we are always called to conversion.

We can begin to overlook or excuse our sexism and our divisions and our quarreling factions. Jesus was very supportive of women – and so eager to promote unity and peace.

We can dismiss or even persecute the prophets God sends us – the way the tenants of the vineyard treated the prophets God sent them.

We can cling comfortably to our traditions and ways of doing things – when the signs of the times are calling for new attitudes, new structures, and totally new projects.

And, of course, we can become smug as individuals. We can feel satisfied and complacent because after all – we are faithful to weekly worship and the financial support of our parish – and forget that we are called to produce good fruit by a life of good works beyond the walls of the Church.

Are we deepening our trust in God and our embraced of the values of the God's kingdom – following after the example of Christ?

Are we practicing greater forgiveness, reconciliation, acceptance, sharing and service in our relationships with the people with whom we live and work?

Are we responsible stewards of the goods of our “common home” as Pope Francis calls our world – not always grasping for more --- and do we recognize the generous hand of God in all that we have?

God, the owner of the vineyard – continues to nurture the vineyard. The lesson for us today is that we have to attend carefully to the kinds of fruit we are bearing – and be cautious about the type of stones we are throwing at each other – as well as the type of stones we are rejecting.