

October 8, 2017 Rocky Homily: In the Academy Award winning film, “*Rocky*”, the featured character is a down and out 30 year old boxer from Philadelphia named Rocky Balboa. In one memorable scene, Rocky goes to his neighborhood gym, where he has trained for many years. In the locker room he discovers that he can no longer get into his locker; his combination has been changed. A fellow boxer informs him that it has been taken from him and given to an up and coming boxer, a likely contender. Rocky then confronts his long time mentor and trainer, Mickey, the owner of the gym. He demanded to know why he no longer had a locker. “Because you are a bum”, shouted Mickey. “You had the heart and the talent to be a great champion you smoke too much, abuse alcohol and never put enough time into training. What a waste of talent! And now you are working for a notorious loan shark and bookie, Gazzo. You disrespected me as your mentor. You are unworthy of the locker”.

Ouch!

The background of today’s parable of the wicked servants from the twenty-first chapter of St. Matthew’s gospel is worthy of note. Our Blessed Lord’s death is now imminent. He stands in the shadow of the holy temple in Jerusalem, where a great multitude of the faithful has gathered. There he addresses the parable to the corrupt temple officials, a small cadre of highly influential and powerful religious leaders, whose authority in religious matters was not in dispute. Jesus shows his disdain for them and issues a severe warning: “The Kingdom of God will be taken away from you, and be given to a people that will produce its fruit.” (Mt.21:43)

In the parable, the owner of the vineyard symbolizes God Himself. The vineyard symbolizes his people, the Jews, as well as the life he gives. The tenants are the caretakers of the vineyard and represent the religious leaders themselves. The servants/slaves symbolize the prophets, messengers of god who were often rejected and even killed for proclaiming God’s Word. The owner’s son represents Jesus, who is sent by his Father to his people. The parable foreshadows what will happen to the Son (Jesus). He will be led out of Jerusalem and be killed.

What does this parable have to say to us?

God has given each of us a free will and has a project for us, who are his friends, but unfortunately, too many of our contemporaries reject or ignore Him. It seems more and more baptized Christians choose to make him irrelevant and banish Him from their hearts. Mass attendance continues to dwindle and fewer Catholic’s are opting for marriage in church. Pride and selfishness prevent them from recognizing God’s most precious gift, His Beloved Son.

Generally speaking, we do not treat the prophets in our midst very well. They make us uncomfortable, disturb our consciences. Just consider some of our recent “prophets”?

Martin Luther King, the great civil rights leader, was assassinated; the sworn enemy of apartheid in South Africa, Nelson Mandela, was imprisoned for decades, the Russian patriot, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, was convicted on false charges and later spent time in a Siberian labor camp; Dorothy Day, the founder of the Catholic worker movement, was arrested many times for her outspoken defense of America’s poor and marginalized.

And lastly, there is Joe Scheidler, a pro-life activist from Chicago, who suffered greatly for his defense of unborn human life. He was badly beaten, regularly trashed by the local media, threatened with death numerous times, and was sued for his activism. Legal costs almost bankrupted him.

Let us prove ourselves worthy of our vocation to serve in the Lord's vineyard. May we always put our skills to good use for the sake of Christ and his kingdom.

In closing, Let us recall that the true vine and source of our nourishment is Christ Himself.

"I am the vine, you are its branches. If a man lives in me, and I in Him, then he will yield abundant fruit."

Amen!