

# THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

## Love The Vineyard

If we look at the Gospel today, we read of a vineyard which is in the wrong hands. The tenants have failed the owner, not only refusing their tribute to him, but murdering his people whom he sends to them. The story clearly refers to Israel, and to the fate of the prophets. Jesus' parable is itself a piece of prophecy: he is providing an overview of the whole of Jewish history, *as God sees it*. This is what a prophet is sent to do: to hold up a mirror to Israel, whereby the people can see what God sees. If the prophet finds this brings him persecution, then he is himself becoming a sign of the people's distance from God. This is itself a piece of revelation. Hidden beneath their irreligion is not indifference, but violence and malice: just as Adam's grabbing of the forbidden fruit was not mere weakness, but a work of disguised pride, rebellion, usurping of the authority of God. Perhaps we can translate the parable forwards, and apply it to our tenancy of the Church, of the world, and of our own life.

### “What Use Are You?”

The question asked by Mrs Muddlecombe the night war broke out is one we could ask ourselves, as soon as we realise that in making us God made an *investment*. Our whole life changes when this fact comes home; we are not like people who have “no-one to please except themselves”; we have a Creator who *has let us know the mystery of his purpose, to bring all things together under Christ as head*. So our aim is not merely to assure ourselves of our own comfort, and the closeness of those we love, and an adequate supply of good things to enjoy. Rather, we are participants in a much greater project, one whose aims include the whole Universe as one vast context. This is what it means to believe in One God.

### Selfo, Besto

Of course, the task of assuring our own comfort, etcetera, as outlined above is very engrossing, and indeed can become a life's work. We can do it so industriously that we lose any larger view of things. It is then, I think, that we have “appropriated the vineyard”. We've forgotten that we are only tenants, and that the fate of the place we live in rests in the hand of its true proprietor. Nothing could be further from the mind of our age, where possession is an absolute term, not a relative one, and where *freedom* means being unaccountable to anyone or anything - except

ourselves. This is the cast of mind of a successful hi-jacker or car-thief, not a servant of God. Because *no-one can steal from the Father*, our situation contains the seeds of its own destruction.

### And When The Owner Comes Back ?

He will repossess what is his, and redistribute his property. The new tenants will deliver the fruit in due season. Now, in the mind of the evangelist, *we* are the new tenants. Matthew certainly regarded the Jewish establishment as implicated in the death of Jesus, and therefore doomed to be dispossessed; the eventual destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple was widely seen as the fulfilment of this dispossession. But this turns the spotlight onto us. How are we doing as *tenants of the vineyard*? Do we live like people with a debt to honour, or as sole owners, accountable to no-one but ourselves? Jesus has told us that, if our holiness goes no deeper than that of the Scribes and Pharisees, we shall never get into the Kingdom of Heaven. Rather than casting supercilious eyes at those worthies of old, we might ask how our cultivation of the vineyard differs from that of the pagans next door. Can you tell yourself apart from a good pagan? And if not, did Christ die for you in vain? *You do not belong to yourselves: you have been bought and paid for*. We must seek the way to live obediently, ready to be built into God's project, rather than finding ourselves firmly built into the doomed house that is The World. *Fr Philip*