

Scripture Study

Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time – Cycle A



Opening prayer

Isaiah 55:10-11

(Ps 65:10-14)

Romans 8:18-23

Matthew 13:1-23

Overview of the Gospel:

- This week's Gospel reading brings us to Matthew 13, a chapter of parables told by Jesus broken up in such a way that he can explain their meaning. The crowds Jesus is speaking to are so large he needs to get into a boat to avoid being crushed and so that he can be heard by all. He begins with his famous parable of the Sower and the seeds.
- The soil in Israel was of uneven quality: Seed had to be spread everywhere since finding the "good" soil was too time consuming. The "rocky ground" was not filled with stones; rather, it was composed of thin soil over hard limestone. Also, the thorny weeds commonly found in that area were not pulled up, but plowed under and mixed with the soil.
- In his parable, Jesus addresses in turn the Sower (verses 1-8), the non-listeners (verses 10-15), the listeners (verses 16-17), and the right understanding (verses 18-22) that leads to fruitfulness in the Spirit (verse 23). See also Matthew 7:16-20, 12:33; John 15:5 and Galatians 5:22-23.

Questions:

- In the 1st Reading, what does the prophet Isaiah tell us about the effectiveness of God's word? How does this relate to the Gospel Reading?
- How does the 2nd Reading convey the reality that the Kingdom of God is "now present" but "not yet"?
- What is a parable? What do they accomplish that simple and direct speech lacks?
- What four types of soil does Jesus mention? What characterizes each? What happens to the seed in each type of soil?
- What does Jesus' explanation of the parable (vv 18-23) reveal about the seed? About the various soils? The fruit? The Sower?
- How does Jesus' challenge in verse 9 help explain verses 11-12? How does faith open you up to more and more spiritual insight?
- What deep "roots" help to prevent a Christian from falling away? What gives you roots?
- What worries can choke your growth in Christ? How can you free your life from these "thorns"?
- What "crop" does Jesus want Christians to yield? What can you do to increase your productivity?

Catechism of the Catholic Church: §§ 1724, 546, 29

Closing prayer

It is fitting for us, meditating upon the glory of this [future] splendor, to endure all afflictions and persecutions because, although the afflictions of the just man are many, yet those who trust in God are delivered from them all. –St. Cyprian of Carthage (ca. 250 A.D.)

Remember to read and meditate on the daily Mass readings found in the bulletin!

"Why do you speak to them in parables?"

Scripture: *Matthew 13:1-23*

Meditation: What is the best and easiest way to help people understand God's kingdom? Like the rabbis of his time, Jesus very frequently used parables – short stories and images taken from everyday life – to convey hidden truths about the kingdom of God. Like a skillful artist, Jesus sketched memorable pictures with short and simple words. A good image can speak more loudly and clearly than many words. Jesus used the ordinary everyday illustrations of life and nature to point to another order of reality – hidden, yet visible to those who had "eyes to see" and "ears to hear". Jesus communicated with vivid illustrations which captured the imaginations of his audience more powerfully than any abstract presentation could. His parables are like buried treasure waiting to be discovered (Matthew 13:44).

What can the parable about seeds and roots teach us about the kingdom of God? Any farmer will attest to the importance of good soil for supplying nutrients for growth. And how does a plant get the necessary food and water it needs except by its roots? The scriptures frequently use the image of fruit-bearing plants or trees to convey the principle of spiritual life and death. (see Jeremiah 17:7-8; see also Psalm 1:3)

Jesus' parable of the sower is aimed at the hearers of his word. There are different ways of accepting God's word and they produce different kinds of fruit accordingly. There is the prejudiced hearer who has a shut mind. Such a person is unteachable and blind to what he or she doesn't want to hear. Then there is the shallow hearer. He or she fails to think things out or think them through; they lack depth. They may initially respond with an emotional reaction; but when it wears off their



mind wanders to something else. Another type of hearer is the person who has many interests or cares, but who lacks the ability to hear or comprehend what is truly important. Such a person is too busy to pray or too preoccupied to study and meditate on God's word. Then there is the one whose mind is open. Such a person is at all times willing to listen and to learn. He or she is never too proud or too busy to learn. They listen in order to understand. God gives grace to those who hunger for his word that they may understand his will and have the strength to live according to it. Do you hunger for God's word?

Jesus told his disciples that not everyone would understand his parables. Did Jesus mean to say that he was deliberately confusing or hiding the meaning of his stories from his listeners? Very likely not. Jesus was speaking from experience. He was aware that some who heard his parables refused to understand them. It was not that they could not intellectually understand them, but rather, their hearts were closed to what Jesus was saying. They had already made up their minds to not believe. God can only reveal the secrets of his kingdom – that which is hidden to the spiritually blind – to those who hunger for God and humbly submit to his truth.

What can makes us ineffective or unresponsive to God's word? Preoccupation with other things can distract us from what is truly important and worthwhile. And letting our hearts and minds be consumed with material things can easily weigh us down and draw us away from the heavenly treasure that lasts for eternity. God's word can only take root in a receptive heart which is docile and ready to hear what God has to say. The parables of Jesus will enlighten us if we approach them with an open mind and heart, ready to let them challenge us. If we approach them with the conviction that we already know the answer, then we, too, may look but not see, listen but not understand. God's word can only take root in a receptive heart that is ready to believe and willing to submit. Do you submit to God's word with trust and obedience?

One lesson from this parable is clear: *the harvest is sure to come*. While some seed will fall by the wayside and some fall on shallow ground and never come to maturity, and some be choked to death by the thorns; nonetheless a harvest will come. The seed that falls on good soil, on the heart that is receptive, will reap abundant fruit. God is always ready to speak to each of us and to give us understanding of his word. Are you hungry for his word? And do you allow anything to keep you from submitting to God's word with joy and trusting obedience?

"Lord Jesus, faith in your word is the way to wisdom, and to ponder your divine plan is to grow in the truth. Open my eyes to your deeds, and my ears to the sound of your call, that I may understand your will for my life and live according to it".

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