

15th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME YEAR A 2020

Isaiah 55:10-11 Roman 8:18-23 Matthew 13:1-23

Reflection

Fr Tao Pham

The readings for this weekend use the analogy of farming and sowing seed to talk about how the teachings of God and Jesus, His Son, sometimes produce abundantly; but at other times do not. In the first reading (*Isaiah 55:10-11*) the prophet Isaiah tells us that God cares for the earth by sending rain to make it fruitful. And God cares for us by sending us his word. Our reading emphasises the effectiveness of God's Word. The rain always produces positive results; eventually somewhere the earth responds and becomes fruitful. So God persists with his Word until he gets a response.

The parable of the sower in the Gospel today (*Mt 13:1-23*) echoes that same idea: the Word of God achieves the end for which it was sent. Despite the hard ground, predatory birds, stones, thorns, and weeds, the seed finally finds some good soil and produces a harvest, in some cases even a hundred per cent. The parable is telling us that despite all obstacles the word of God will bear fruit.

The parable was meant to encourage Jesus' disciples. It assured them that in spite of frustrations and apparent failures, the kingdom of God would grow. The sower in the parable is an image of God. And God in his extravagance is unlike any farmer that ever lived. He scatters the seed around in a display of reckless generosity. Our God is like that – he sows the precious seed of his Word in the most unlike places. And he keeps on sowing his word in human hearts even though he knows that much of what he sows will be eaten by the birds, or fall on rocks or among thorns. There is no sinner beyond the reach of God's mercy. God never gives up on anyone. He loves every one of us.

In his love, God is continually calling us to a better and more fruitful life. God doesn't speak to us like a dictator to his subjects. He speaks to us as a Father speaks to his children. His word is gentle because it is the voice of love. Yet that word is more effective than the word of the most powerful dictator – it can change our hearts.

God speaks to us in the Sacred Scriptures. But he also speaks to us through the events of our lives. But it the words of Scripture that help us to interpret what God is saying to us in those events. We will not be judged by results but only by the efforts we have made. For us, we try our best and leave the result for God.

God doesn't speak to us like a dictator speaks to his subjects. God's voice is a very gentle one. This is because it is the voice of love. Yet, God's gentle voice has the power to turn our hearts from a desert into a garden. God's word is essentially an appeal to our hearts. God longs for our hearts, and is continually calling us into communion with himself and with one another. Unfortunately, the heart is not always receptive.

Clearly the parable applies to all words. But Jesus was talking specifically about the word of God. The ground in which the precious seed of God's word is sown is the human heart. Jesus as there are some kinds of ground that are conducive to growth and others that militate against it, so it is with the human heart. There are states of heart that favour growth and states that hinder it. Jesus compared the word to a seed. It's a beautiful image. A seed has the potential to enrich. But for that to happen it needs to fall into favourable ground. So God's word has the power to enrich our lives, provided we receive it favourably.

The word of God is like seed sown with the expectation of reaping a good harvest that is guiding mankind to live according to the teachings of God and the Church. Our heart and mind, soul and body, in other words, our entire being is like the soil.

In the course of lives we hear an enormous number of words. Most of these go in one ear and out the other, and so have effect on our lives. But some have a profound effect on our lives. Why? Because they go straight to our hearts. The seed is good and the same, the difference lies in the ground it falls.

- The seed that fell on the edge of the path represents those hearts are hard. Sadly, God's call makes no impression on them. A hard heart is a closed heart, so it can't receive. A hard heart inevitably becomes a barren heart.
- The seed fell on stony ground represents those whose hearts are resistant. God's call is heard alright but doesn't make a deep impression. When difficulties occur, it fades away.
- The seed that fell among the thorns represents those whose hearts are so full of worldly concerns that the call of God gets drowned out. It is not that God is deliberately excluded, but that there is no room for God.
- And the seed that fell on good ground represents those who receive God's call with open and generous hearts, and in responding to it, and put the word of God into their daily practice, produce a harvest of goodness.

We are not just hearers of the word, we also sowers of the word. This is particularly true in the case of parents, teachers, and preachers. But to some extent it is true of us all. Jesus' parable is a very encouraging one for sowers. It tells them not to be discouraged if no 'product' is apparent. Their job is to go on sowing the good seed and not to get discouraged. We must leave the harvest to God. All you and I can do is sow the seed, by word and example, as best we can. That's what the Lord expects the Church, the preachers, parents and friends to do. After that, there is the mysterious chemistry between the seed and the soil that takes over.

The point of this parable is that when the seed falls on good soil, it lets out roots and shoots and produces a terrific harvest of thirty, sixty and a hundred grains for the one that was sown, a bonanza! Faith in Christ is handed on and the Church grows. All that we see in the Church, schools, religious orders, parishes, the commitment of so many people to the work of the Gospel are products of seed in good soil. Through the parable of the sower in the Gospel today, we can learn a good lesson how to judge: Judge the power of the seed not by the seed that falls on pavement, rock or thorns, but by the seed that falls on good ground. Judge the power of God's Word not by the nominal Christians but by what it does in the lives of those who deeply embrace the Word of Christ. Judge the Church not by its sinners but by its saints. That's where we see the real power of God's Word.

Let us learn some lessons from the parable today:

As hearers, we try our best to hear the Word of God by reading Scriptures, learning the Word of God, meditating them and put them into our daily practice. As sowers of the Word of God, we try our best to sow the seed by proclaiming the Word of God to others if we can and especially showing others our good Christian's examples. Amen.

***Dear Parishioners of St Mary's, St Peter, Sacred Heart and St Thomas',
According to pandemic outbreak in our State this time, we have to adhere and follow the
restrictions rules for another new stage. Therefore, we cannot see each other in person. We miss
all of you so much! We, your priests, can't celebrate Mass publicly, however, we can celebrate
daily Mass privately and pray for you and your family. May Almighty God bless you, be with you
and protect you and your family always.
Let us keep praying and ask God help the world to stop the pandemic crisis as soon as possible.
Fr Tao Pham***