

15th Sunday Ordinary Time- Year "A"

July 12-13, 2014

Readings: Isaiah 55:10-11; Romans 8:18-23; Matt. 13:1-23

The word *parable* represents a Hebrew word "masal" meaning "a wise saying" or a maxim. Parables have their root in the Old Testament, but Jesus used these sayings in a unique way, putting his own mark on them. Scholars generally count nine OT parables, but their purpose was mostly to bring the listener to concede a point that he did not perceive as applicable to himself. Recall how Nathan rebuked King David by telling a parable of a rich man taking advantage of a poor one. When David admits the wrongness of the action Nathan then points out that the parable is referring to his treatment of Uriah, whom he killed.

Things aren't so easy in the New Testament. Here, many parables are more difficult to understand, and no one is there to pinpoint the answer except ourselves, when we stop for a moment to reflect on their meaning. Without the response of faith, the parable will ultimately remain unintelligible.

Today's parable is perhaps the most straightforward, but the lesson can be appreciated from many angles. The parable of the sower is instructive here because it speaks to us of perseverance, of waiting patiently for the Word to reach its desired effect, and trusting that it will. Not all of the seeds we plant for our faith will yield fruit a hundred fold. In fact, many of our own efforts fall well short of what we intended. Do we easily give up?

*"As he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them."* People have long since tired of reading bad news in the paper, and the weariness has led some to question their commitment to the Church. The birds have devoured their sense of peace about their faith. One day they just had enough.

*"Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it had little soil."*

A zealous new convert joins the parish at Easter and immediately begins volunteering for everything. But soon it becomes apparent that the excitement when all was new has begun to wear off, and the attendance begins to wane. This can happen.

*"Other seeds fell upon thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them."*

An active family was a part of the parish and school. When their last child graduated from the school not only did their membership on various committees drop off, but they were less frequent in Mass attendance. It was almost as if the Church had done what they wanted for their family, and now, there was no more reason to participate.

Obviously I am not referring to any particular person, but these stories all happen, more often than we might think. One of the greatest dangers in the spiritual life is discouragement. The Word of God seems effective, only to end in apparent failure. We can lament the fact that fewer people go to Church in this country than in the 1950's, but what good does that do today? Let us rejoice in the new families who are joining our parish, in the steady interest in learning about the Mass and the Faith amongst our youngest members and the other sings of hope.

We mustn't forget in the parable of the Sower that three out of the four soils failed to nurture the growth of the seed. We receive a dose of reality as well as a promise of hope from Isaiah—for we are to trust that eventually God's Word will be effective, even if that effectiveness entails the pain of discouragement and failure that comes with carrying our Cross. We must remain rooted deeply in God's love and grace and fight the temptation towards discouragement. Let the Word of God achieve the end for which it was sent. For today, let us rejoice in our blessings.