

15th Sunday Ordinary Time- Year "A"

July 15-16, 2017

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

Today's parable causes me to reflect upon the manner in which we plant seeds and witness to our faith in the world. Knowing full well that it is not sufficient to merely post Mass times on a door and expect that people will be engaged and active, how do we engage a culture increasingly distracted by the world?

There are numerous ways that we can witness to our faith beyond these four walls, and we are called to do so with zeal and creativity. I was impressed with a youth group that came for a visit and a Mass early last week. They were from the Diocese of Duluth and I even joined them for lunch at Cossetta's. A few days later about a dozen of them returned to do a few hours of service work, pruning and weeding out near the front steps. They wanted to give back to the Cathedral. They did so with smiles and courtesy. Teaching the virtue of service early on is one way that we form committed disciples, who seek to serve others before themselves.

I think of our Young Adult programs at Theology on Tap. Those who do not come to O'Gara's on a Wednesday evening expecting to hear a talk or a musical concert receive one anyway, and I think it is paramount to evangelize. While mingling with the group, I feel invigorated by their faith and their willingness to witness to the world. This is the case despite the prevalent young adult culture in our society, mistrustful of authority including in the Church.

At the same time, not all the seeds we plant will germinate. Some are trampled underfoot, as in St. Luke's version of this parable.

Hand sowing is the process of casting handfuls of seed over prepared ground. Today most seed is now sown using a seed drill, which places the seed at a measured distance below the soil. Hand

sowing is tedious, and it takes much longer than planting a mature shrub or laying sod in your front yard. So many of us struggle to exercise the patience necessary to see the fruits of our labors. We want our results right now, as I can attest from personal experience!

However, over time we do see the growth in the plants. Trees I recall my parents planting in our backyard now tower over our family home. When growth is incremental, we fail to see the changes. So often our focus in this parable has been on the seed sown in the shallow ground, where it withered for lack of roots.

But what about the seed sown among thorns? The parable notes the “lure of riches” that choke out the Word. Priestly ministry in the Church is not for personal gain. Rather, our commitment is first and foremost to Jesus Christ and His Church. After that, we are committed to a local Church in communion with our bishop and also as members of our parish. This is what it means to be firmly rooted and planted in solid ground.

The parable of the Sower speaks to us of perseverance, of waiting patiently for the Word to reach its desired effect, and trusting that it will. In fact, many of our own efforts fall well short of what we intended. We become anxious and easily discouraged, a word in its root meaning to “take away one’s heart.”

In the Old Testament book of *Song of Songs*, the sacred author writes: “On my bed at night I sought him whom my soul loves—I sought him but I did not find him.”¹ In his Letter to the Romans, Saint Paul addresses the same malaise: “But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait with endurance.”² Seeking the Lord without finding Him is extremely frustrating and discouraging.

¹ Song of Songs 3:1

² Romans 8:25

But Saint Paul also said that “hope does not disappoint,”³ so we must see the whole witness of Scripture.

The great spiritual writers often used other words. St. Ignatius of Loyola contrasts desolation with consolation. Desolation includes “darkness of the soul, turmoil of the mind...restlessness resulting from many disturbances and temptations which lead to loss of faith, loss of hope, and loss of love.”⁴

When you are discouraged, Ignatius cautioned against making any major decisions or changes. It is not the right time for that, as we may be especially tempted by the Evil One in those times.

Eventually, we will experience God’s consolation, when the Holy Spirit prompts some interior movement of our soul so that we feel transformed at our core. Consolation is the experience of a deep union with God, and it fills us with a sense of peace and joy. The core of the experience lies in God and not in ourselves.

Recall that 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 today, as well as a promise of hope from Isaiah, for we are to trust that God's Word will be effective, even amidst of the pains of disappointment and failure that come with carrying our Cross.

Never give up on the Word of God, for there is nothing defective about the Seed—and the Sower is God Himself. Each one of us must remain rooted deeply in God’s love and grace. Let the Word of God achieve the end for which it was sent. In the meantime, let us all count our blessings.

³ Romans 5:5

⁴ Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola- Rules for Discernment of Spirits