

15th Sunday Ordinary Time- Year "A"

July 11-12, 2020

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

Parables have their root in the Old Testament, but Jesus used these sayings in a unique way in the New Testament. Scholars generally count nine OT parables, but their purpose was mostly to bring the listener to concede a point that he does not perceive as applicable to himself. Think of Nathan confronting David about his moral failure by means of a parable. 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 remains unintelligible.

Our first reading tells us that God's word is effective and that it will not return to the Father void but will triumph and achieve the end for which it was sent. That is surely an optimistic statement. Do you believe that God's word is achieving its intended purpose in your life?

The parable of the sower is among the most straightforward; it even provides its own explanation. 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 with respect to our faith will yield fruit a hundredfold. Many of our own efforts fall well short of what we intended. Are we anxious about that? Do we easily give up?

*"As he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them."* While the Church is of divine origin, and thus indefectible, its members surely are not. There is an old saying- when you find the perfect Church, by all means join it. Just realize that once you do, it is no longer perfect. Each of us is flawed. This ought not to scandalize us, though plenty of events have caused scandal in the Church.

For some, it is just too much and their zeal for the faith plummets. Their love of the Church is devoured by scandal and they fade away.

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

An active millennial enjoys the activities the parish provides through a Young Adults Group. Once she marries, it becomes more of a challenge to participate and the newlywed couple attends only infrequently. Life gets in the way, and the couple soon has a six-month old child who is not yet baptized. They just got busy it seems.

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

A zealous new convert is received into the Church at the Easter Vigil and immediately begins volunteering for everything at the parish. The RCIA sponsor beautifully welcomed and accompanied him, but then relocates for a new job. The new Catholic loses an important connection and stops attending Church on any regular basis.

Not a very encouraging picture is it? The situations are generic, yet they surely happen more than we might think. While this parable speaks about the necessity of planting seed on solid ground, the real lesson here is about patient endurance, and not being overly anxious.

One of the greatest dangers in the spiritual life is discouragement. The Word of God seems effective, yet ends in apparent failure. We can lament that fewer people attend Church than did a generation ago. We ought to ask why. However, it is neither 1950 nor 1970; it is 2020 and we must deal with our reality. The Church is as countercultural as ever, yet people still seek communion and initiation into the Church, in large part because of a set of principles to which we ascribe.

We could lament our sexually permissive society, where cohabitation before marriage seems so ordinary, it hardly seems to offend anyone anymore. Or, we can also rejoice each time that a couple chooses a

sacramental marriage according to the guidelines of the Faith, as happened here this weekend, and commend them for it.

Note that in the parable of the Sower, three out of the four soils failed to nurture the growth of the seed. We have been prescribed a 200 mg dose of reality today as well as a promise of hope from Isaiah. We are called to trust that God's Word will be effective, even if it operates amidst the vicissitudes of life, including the pain of discouragement and failure that are constitutive of carrying our Cross.

Never give up on the Word of God, for there is nothing defective about the Seed, this much is guaranteed. 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. In the meantime, rejoice in your blessings.