

Cycle A 15th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reading 1 IS 55:10-11

Thus says the LORD: Just as from the heavens the rain and snow come down and do not return there till they have watered the earth, making it fertile and fruitful, giving seed to the one who sows and bread to the one who eats, so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; my word shall not return to me void, but shall do my will, achieving the end for which I sent it.

Responsorial Psalm PS 65:10, 11, 12-13, 14

R. (Lk 8:8) The seed that falls on good ground will yield a fruitful harvest.

You have visited the land and watered it; greatly have you enriched it. God's watercourses are filled; you have prepared the grain.

R. The seed that falls on good ground will yield a fruitful harvest.

Thus have you prepared the land: drenching its furrows, breaking up its clods, Softening it with showers, blessing its yield.

R. The seed that falls on good ground will yield a fruitful harvest.

You have crowned the year with your bounty, and your paths overflow with a rich harvest; The untilled meadows overflow with it, and rejoicing clothes the hills.

R. The seed that falls on good ground will yield a fruitful harvest.

The fields are garmented with flocks and the valleys blanketed with grain. They shout and sing for joy.

R. The seed that falls on good ground will yield a fruitful harvest.

Reading 2 ROM 8:18-23

Brothers and sisters: I consider that the sufferings of this present time are as nothing compared with the glory to be revealed for us. For creation awaits with eager expectation the revelation of the children of God; for creation was made subject to futility, not of its own accord but because of the one who subjected it, in hope that creation itself would be set free from slavery to corruption and share in the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that all creation is groaning in labor pains even until now; and not only that, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, we also groan within ourselves as we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.

Gospel MT 13:1-23

On that day, Jesus went out of the house and sat down by the sea. Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat down, and the whole crowd stood along the shore. And he spoke to them at length in parables, saying: "A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky ground, where it had little soil. It sprang up at once because the soil was not deep, and when the sun rose it was scorched, and it withered for lack of roots. Some seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it. But some seed fell on rich soil, and produced fruit, a hundred or sixty or thirtyfold. Whoever has ears ought to hear."

The disciples approached him and said, "Why do you speak to them in parables?" He said to them in reply, "Because knowledge of the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven has been granted to you, but to them it has not been granted. To anyone who has, more will be given and he will grow rich; from anyone who has not, even what he has will be taken away. This is why I speak to them in parables, because they look but do not see and hear but do not listen or understand. Isaiah's prophecy is fulfilled in them, which says: You shall indeed hear but not understand, you shall indeed look but never see. Gross is the heart of this people, they will hardly hear with their ears, they have closed their eyes, lest they see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their hearts and be converted, and I heal them. "But blessed are your eyes, because they see, and your ears,

because they hear. Amen, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.

"Hear then the parable of the sower. The seed sown on the path is the one who hears the word of the kingdom without understanding it, and the evil one comes and steals away what was sown in his heart. The seed sown on rocky ground is the one who hears the word and receives it at once with joy. But he has no root and lasts only for a time. When some tribulation or persecution comes because of the word, he immediately falls away. The seed sown among thorns is the one who hears the word, but then worldly anxiety and the lure of riches choke the word and it bears no fruit. But the seed sown on rich soil is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields a hundred or sixty or thirtyfold."

“so shall my Word that goes forth from my mouth, my Word shall not return to me void, but shall do my will, achieving the end for which I sent it.” ... “Whoever has ears ought to hear”

The scriptures today are all about God’s bountiful love for all His creation. His word of the Kingdom is sown like seed, is broadcast far and wide for all to hear, for all to see, even on those whose hearts are like rocky or thorny thin soil. And, those of us who understand with our hearts, whose faith is growing strong, we have an awesome responsibility to sow God’s love so everyone may become like rich soil “achieving the end for which He sent it.”

The farmer in today’s Gospel parable should be our mentor. We work hard, and only sometimes succeed. Some of the best things that we give to others may not be well received. Maybe even most of what we want to sow in the lives of those around us doesn’t seem to “take”. It doesn’t seem to become rooted and permanently planted in their lives...at least in the way we wanted. All of us must deal with failure, especially in those areas where the best we have given to others comes up lacking, falling short of our hopes, and our great expectations.

There are some commentators who suggest that today’s Gospel parable was autobiographical. Jesus certainly had to face the pain of failure: His own hometown folks in Nazareth rejected Him. His own Jewish countrymen rejected His message. How about His handpicked twelve? One of them sold Him for thirty pieces of silver...Peter denied...Thomas doubted...the others fled when He was crucified.

Maybe this Gospel parable sounds too dismal and discouraging. The point today, however, is that we need to remember that Jesus did not let apparent failure stop Him. In His parable, Jesus went on to speak about crops that yielded a bountiful harvest, some yielding spectacular amounts. God loves us so much that today’s Gospel parable is not a sad story – it is a story of hope, not of despair.

You see, crisis is made up of both danger and opportunity. It’s true, evil surrounds us, but evil is slowly being overcome. God is at work among us bringing good to overcome evil. We must recognize that in the hands of God the slightest good can be multiplied to impact thousands. We only need to hand our efforts into His care. If God is not in our lives, then who is?

You and I, like all good farmers who continually face disasters of every sort, need to seriously engage ourselves in the enterprise of faith and hope, sowing the best of what we have, and then letting God's sun, wind, and gentle rains do the rest. God's only-begotten Son, along with His gentle Holy Spirit, provide waters of grace to nourish and sustain what we have sown in the lives of those we love. Believe this: The best years of our lives, and the best that we have given to others, or are giving right now, or will give in the future, will take root and not be fruitless.

No doubt as parents we have poured all of our love and faith into our children. We nurture their bodies, minds and souls the best we know how. We teach them to live our faith by how we live. And yet we have seen so many leave the Church and go elsewhere...or to no religion at all. Instead of being worried, however, we must never let them out of our reach...we must continue to relentlessly embrace them with our love and faith. The love and the faith that we have sown in the hearts of those around us, particularly in the hearts and souls of our children, will blossom. The hopes and dreams that we sow in others, even when they seem to be buried under too much dirt, will germinate, grow, and yield a harvest...even if our efforts do not now appear to be successful. Be must confident that God will make it so.

Sure, the world is a mess, but it always has been. We need to see that there is also an amazing amount of goodness and grace in the world. The greatest miracles are found everywhere in those around us...in those who, in spite of terrible odds, yield love and kindness, care and sensitivity, thirty, sixty or a hundred-fold! I have seen and even met many modern-day heroes among us right here in Atlanta who are doing miracles and leading us as never before in efforts to rid our world of hunger, homelessness, fear, racism, and injustice.

And so, my brothers and sisters, we need to keep sowing God's good seeds in the lives of those around us because as God Himself said today through His prophet Isaiah: *"so shall my Word that goes forth from my mouth, my Word shall not return to me void, but shall do my will, achieving the end for which I sent it."* ... *"Whoever has ears ought to hear"*