

July 13, 2014 - Homily

"A sower went out to sow ..." What is it that the sower sows? "Seeds" we are told. What does the seed represent? Often the answer given is "God's word," given the First Reading from the prophet Isaiah about God's word being sent to the earth in order to produce fruit. But in Jesus' own explanation of the parable to the disciples, it becomes clear that the seed actually represents "the one who hears the word of the Kingdom."

Jesus interprets his parable as describing the circumstances of those to whom the "word of the Kingdom" is preached. The path represents hearing without understanding. The rocky ground represents hearing, but not taking root. The thorns represent worldly cares and the lure of riches. Finally, the rich soil represents receiving the word with understanding, thus bearing fruit.

We have all heard the "word of the Kingdom" spoken to us many times throughout our lives. What is this "word of the Kingdom"? The technical term for it is "the kerygma." Let's just call it "the Good News." So, what is "the Good News"? It is four-fold:

- God created humankind to be in relationship with the Trinity.
- Humanity was disobedient and became enslaved to sin.
- The Father sent His Son to rescue us from bondage to sin.
- Through Jesus, in the power of the Holy Spirit, the Father makes it possible for us to grow in our relationship with the Trinity, a relationship that leads to eternal life.

That's quite a mouthful! Here is a simpler version:

- Created in love.
- Lost in sin.
- Redeemed by Jesus.
- Empowered by grace.

That's the Good News!

What keeps us from receiving and accepting the Good News according to Jesus' parable?

1. Not taking the time to understand the Good News fully (the seed that falls on the path).
2. Not allowing the Good News to make a difference in our daily life (the seed that falls on rocky ground).
3. Becoming distracted by worldly cares and the lure of riches (the seed that falls among the thorns).

So how can we develop the "rich soil" in which the seed "bears fruit and yields a hundredfold"?

- ❖ Taking the time for daily prayer and ongoing formation as a disciple of Jesus.
- ❖ Pursuing conversion of heart through the regular examination of our conscience and good Christian fellowship.
- ❖ Placing our time, treasure, and talents at the service of God and neighbor.

Jesus is always calling us to the fullness of life in Him. The Father is always showering us with grace through the action of the Holy Spirit in our minds and hearts. As God declared through the prophet

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Isaiah: "Just as the rain and snow come down from the heavens and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it fertile and fruitful ... so my word shall not return to me void, but shall do my will, achieving the end for which I sent it.

God's will for us - the "end" for which he created us - is grace-filled living here on earth, and eternal life with the Trinity in heaven. As St. Paul declares in today's Second reading: nothing can be compared with "the glory to be revealed for us." He uses the image of creation groaning with labor pains, and we ourselves also groaning within, in the hope of the fullness of redemption.

In other words, we must strive - we must make the effort - to cooperate with God's great plan and the opportunities of grace He showers upon us daily. Going back to the imagery of the parable, for soil to be rich, the hard ground needs to be tilled, the rocks removed, the weeds uprooted. A garden must be tended, taken care of: it has to be watered, fertilized, and regularly weeded.

The same is true of our spiritual life, our relationship as disciples of the Lord: we need the water of prayer and ongoing formation, the fertilizer of the sacraments and Christian fellowship, and the pulling out of the weeds of selfishness through ministry and being of service to others.

My dear friends, this parish is the garden in which the Lord has planted us. It is our common vocation to tend - to take care of -this garden. Cooperating with God's grace - through prayer, faith formation, worship, fellowship, and service - let us strive to produce a bountiful harvest as disciples of the Lord, in eager expectation of the fullness of the glory God wishes to reveal in us.