

THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER: A call to hear, accept and commit to act

July 13, 2008

15th Ordinary Sunday

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“The seed that falls on good ground will yield a fruitful harvest.” [Mt 13:8]

A. ISAIAH 55:10-11-- The Context. This book covers events during the last years of the Babylonian captivity circa 540-537 B.C. **In today's portion** the prophet reminds the people **to heed God's word because God expects his word to bear fruit**. God's creative and nurturing work is compared with rain and snow falling on the earth. [RG, 231, TCB 937]

B. PSALM 65:10-14--The Context. The community, aware of its unworthiness, gives thanks for divine bounty. **At God's touch the earth becomes alive with vegetation** and flocks. [TCB p.688]

C. ROMANS 8:18-23—The Context: Paul wrote this book between 56-58 A.D. from Greece to stress salvation and justification through faith in Christ. **Today's text** teaches that the glory that believers are destined to share with Christ far exceeds the sufferings of the present life. **As the created world shares in the penalty of corruption** brought about by sin, so also will it share in the benefits of redemption that comprise the ultimate liberation of God's people. **All creation is now groaning in labor pains as it awaits the Spirit's full harvest.** [RG 397, TCB 240]

D. MATTHEW 13:1-23--The Context: Matthew was a Greek speaking Jewish convert living at the end of the first century in Antioch, Syria and writing to a Jewish audience around 70-90 A.D. [RG 314] **Today's pericope** recounts **the parable of the sower**. Jesus gives the reason why he uses this type of speech, **declares the blessedness of those who understand his teaching** and explains the parable of the sower. Matthew [TCB p. 25]

WHAT IS GOD SAYING TO ME PERSONALLY TODAY?

THERE ARE THREE DISTINCT PARTS in today's Gospel: parable, interlude, and explanation of the parable. A way of looking at this division is to regard the parable as being close to the actual words of Jesus. This is followed by a theological 'interlude' on "hearing" and finally there is an interpretation of the parable emanating from the early Church and, in effect, producing a related but distinct lesson or message.

The parable has strong links with the First Reading from Isaiah. In both we are told that **God shares his abundance with us and his plans will not be frustrated**. "So," says the Lord in Isaiah, *"the word that goes from my mouth does not return to me empty, without carrying out my will and succeeding in what it was sent to do."*

In the whole of Scripture **God's word is not just a spoken word. It is a doing word, a creating, life-giving word**. It is like a life-bearing seed. Where do we encounter that word? If we are sufficiently sensitive, **we encounter it unceasingly in every experience of our lives, whether that experience is joyful or sad, a success or a failure, pleasant or painful**.

There is clearly, of course, for us one place in particular where God's word is more clearly experienced and that is in Jesus Christ. **For Jesus is the Word of God. Everything that Jesus said, everything that Jesus did was God communicating to us through him**. Not just his teaching but his whole life, from the hidden years of Nazareth through his public life to his death and resurrection, in all of this Jesus was, and is for us today, the Word of God.

Why does Jesus speak in parables? There are those who see but never understand; those who hear and hear but never get the message. Why? Not because they are stupid but **because they basically do not want to**. If they saw, **if they really heard, they might be converted, they might have to change their ways radically**, and that is the last thing they want to do. Jesus words apply not only to the scribes and Pharisees, but to all those today who close their ears in prejudice and fear.

But to his disciples and followers Jesus says, *"Happy are your eyes because they see, your ears*

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because they hear!" Many before Jesus' time longed to see and hear but never got the privilege of Jesus' followers. The key word today is 'hear'. It is a very scriptural word and contains essentially four elements: **(1) to listen with a totally open mind** ("Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God"); **(2) to understand** what one hears; **(3) to accept and appropriate fully what one understands**; and **(4) to make this acceptance flow out into our behavior**.

Listen, understand, accept and implement: All four are necessary for conversion and healing. **D**

Interpretation of the parable:

- **Some seed falls on the path**. There is no soil here. There is no prospect of the seed taking root. Ears and eyes are closed and unreceptive to the Word of God.
- **The seed falls on rocky ground** in the field where there is a thin layer of soil. It is like those Christians who, after baptism or after a retreat or some spiritual experience, have a great rush of enthusiasm for God but, under the slightest pressure, soon run out of steam and fall away. There is no real commitment.
- **The seed falls on soil where there are many weeds and thorns**. It gets smothered by the competing plants. This we might call the "having your cake and eating it" response. I do want to be a good Christian but I also want to have all the things that the world around me thinks important, even if they are in conflict with the Gospel vision. It won't work. We cannot at the same time totally serve God and be a part of the materialistic, consumerist, "success"-hungry world. **Probably a very large number of us, in varying degrees, belong in this category**. This severely hampers the building up of the Kingdom
- **Finally, some of the seed falls in rich, nutritious soil**. This soil is like the "man who really hears." "He is the one who yields a harvest" in varying degrees of abundance.

In the long run the work of God cannot be frustrated either by threats from society or from within the Christian community. But **what matters for me as I hear this Scripture is to be aware that I, as this individual, can refuse to provide the fertile patch of soil for God's Word to take deep root**. God's plan as a whole will succeed but it is up to me to be part of that plan. I personally can say No or Not yet or Yes, but... **I can, like many of the people that Jesus knew, resist the radical change of view that conversion entails**.

And what does conversion entail? (1) A life centered on communion with Jesus through daily prayer and Scripture reading; (2) a mature decision to think and act like Jesus; (3) sharing, caring and serving in my community; (4) celebrating the sacraments in community and (5) living the beatitudes in service to God and to our neighbor in need. And the payoff is: a life of healing, of liberation, of happiness, of joy and of peace. [Frank Doyle, S.J.]

WHAT AM I GOING TO DO ABOUT IT?

Am I aware that God speaks to me in every experience of my life? Do I listen, respond?

Am I a Christian who wants to have all the things that the world thinks important?

Am I ready for a radical conversion in my life to begin to live in Christ?

Is living the beatitudes in service to God & others really important to me now?

[Sources: Scripture readings- *The Catholic Bible, NAB translation, Home Study Edition, (TCB)*, and its Reading Guide (RG); *The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, [JSB]* Jewish Publication Society; *The Jerome Biblical Commentary, (JBC)* 1968 edition; *Dictionary of the Bible (DB)*, J.L.McKenzie, SJ; *Daily Study Bible Series, John (DSBS)*, Wm Barclay; *Sunday Scripture Reflections* by Frank Doyle, SJ at <http://www.sacredspace.ie/livingspace>; 15th Ordinary Sunday. [Compiled by Michael Hosemann].