



My Beloved Ones,

When we contemplate our Lord's ministry, one thing we think of are His parables, such as the Sower and the Seed: *"A sower went out to sow his seed; and as he sowed, some fell on the path and was trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up. Some fell on the rock; and as it grew up, it withered for lack of moisture. Some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew with it and choked it. Some fell into good soil, and when it grew, it produced a hundredfold."* As he said this, he called out, *"Let anyone with ears to hear listen!"* (Luke 8:5-8)

We ordinarily think of parables as a way Christ educated the faithful. The thing we forget is that Christ would often hide His meaning. After Christ says, *"Let anyone with ears to hear listen!"* He says something very different to the Disciples, *"To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God; but to others I speak in parables, so that 'looking they may not perceive, and listening they may not understand.'"* (Luke 8:10)

From there He explains: *"The ones on the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts... The ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word...have no root... and in a time of testing fall away... among the thorns, these are the ones who hear; but as they go on their way, they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature. But as for that in the good soil, these are the ones who, when they hear the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patient endurance."* (Luke 8:12-15) A wonderful summary of how different hearts interact with the Word of God, but many stumble over our Lord saying, *"...but to others I speak in parables, so that 'looking they may not perceive, and listening they may not understand.'"* Why would Christ, the ever-compassionate Second Person of the Holy Trinity, say such a thing?

Christ, as both the inspiration for and a student of Scripture is quoting from the Book of Isaiah, when God tells the Prophet to preach to the people these words: *"Listen carefully, but do not understand! Look intently, but do not perceive!... Lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and their heart understand, and they turn and be healed."* (Isaiah 6:10) God is not a tormenter. In His infinite mercy, He knows that our sinful nature is such that, often, we do not follow His will. The parable of the Sower & the Seed is no great mystery, but surely some who heard our Lord speak about the thorns went home and attended to their business or their pleasure. Indeed, many listened carefully, but their *hearts* did not understand.

When we hear this Gospel again, I hope that we can honestly discover what kind of ground are our hearts. Truly understanding with the heart, we can know if we live on the path, in the rocks, or among the thorns. Instead of despairing, all we must do is hold the Word, *...fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patient endurance.*" In this way, our heart can produce the spiritual fruits we are all called to offer to God, and to our families and neighbors.

+ALEXIOS
Metropolitan of Atlanta