

Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

July 12, 2020 St. Augustine Cathedral/Crowley Center 11:30

Of all 5 of our amazing human senses, one of the greatest is our ability to speak---to communicate with one another thru the use of human speech. One of the great milestones of the first year or so of each of our lives, along with taking our first steps, is saying our first word. I'm sure every parent here remembers the day when each of your children moved from making sounds to actually forming words, and perhaps when every Mom or Dad secretly hopes that their child's first word will be their ability to recognize them---with Mama or Dada.

A major part of our Faith Life has to do with coming to know that God too speaks directly to our hearts about His unconditional Love for us. We need to learn how to hear God's Word in a way that He intends, and to learn how to speak to Him in Love. God's Word has been spoken to the human heart since the earliest days of Revelation. Initially that Word of God was heard by those whom God inspired to write that Word down in the Sacred Books of the Bible, which we have come to know as the Old and New Testaments.

But our Faith also reveals to us that in the fullness of time, God spoke His Word so profoundly that that Word became Flesh, and Jesus---the Word of God---was conceived in the womb of His Mother Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit. And ultimately, that Word made Flesh, our Lord and Savior, fulfilled God's Covenant thru His great Act of Sacrificial Love, reconciling the world and all of us to God thru His suffering, death and Resurrection.

So, when we hear Jesus in today's Gospel say "*Whoever has ears ought to hear*", He's saying much more than that we should listen better, or that we should pay attention to what He has to say, or even that we should really try to figure out what His parable about the Sower and the Seed means. No, Jesus is reminding us that God's Word has a purpose----a goal. Not just to be read in a Holy Book, but to be lived out in each of our lives, which we hope are also "holy", or at least that we're in the process of becoming "holy" as we try to follow Jesus, in Word and deed.

That's what Isaiah told us in today's First Reading too. He talked about the natural elements of "*rain and snow*" which have as their purpose to "*water the earth*" and make it "*fertile and fruitful, giving seed to the sower*". And, as Isaiah continues, in that same way, that's what God

says that His Word does: *"It goes forth from My mouth" to "do My will, achieving the end for which I sent it."*

On Friday I drove to St. Stanislaus Parish in Dorr, a rural community in the northern part of our Diocese to participate in a Funeral Mass of one of our Deacon's mothers. I found myself enjoying that drive so much, and realizing how much I've missed driving throughout the Diocese because of the "stay at home" orders we've all been under for the past several months. It was a beautiful day. The fields are lush with life, and acres and acres of corn, and so many other fruits and vegetables that this part of Michigan is so fortunate to have as far as the eye can see. It made me feel so "alive" to see all that "life" growing and getting ready for harvest in the next few weeks or so. And, already thinking about the Scripture Readings for today's Mass, I couldn't help but think about the farmers who, many weeks ago, sowed those millions and millions of seeds that have come to life, and are now in the process of becoming what they're intended to be.

I'm sure that's why the "Parable about the Sower and the Seed" that Jesus told is so powerful---it's something that's real; something that we can relate to; something that's a part of our own lived experience. But this Parable, and all Jesus' parables, are powerful not only because of what He says, but in the graphic way that Jesus tells the Story. He makes it possible for us to picture the Sower out in the field, extravagantly casting the seeds here, there and everywhere, whether it was on fertile soil, rocky patches, or even among thorns and thistles, hoping that at least some of the seed would take root, and would eventually come to life and bear fruit as it was intended to do. We're all very familiar with this Parable---we've heard it from the earliest days of our lives. Maybe some of us even know it so well we can basically repeat it off by heart: *"A sower went out to sow some seed, and as he sowed....."* We know the story. But, do we know what it means?

God's Word is spoken for a reason, a purpose---and that purpose is always to bring forth Life, and to express His Love. Just like a seed: the only purpose a "seed" has is to become what's inside it. It has no reason to exist except to become what it was intended to be. God intends for His Word to be "heard"; He also expects His Word to be "heeded". It's God's Word that helps us to move from being just a "seed" into what God has given us life for in the first place: to be alive in His Love; to live our life in this world according to God's ways. And, in the process, God wants us to become holy, and ultimately to live with Him forever in Heaven.

So when the Apostles took Jesus aside and questioned Him, “*Why are you speaking in parables?*”, He basically said that He was trying to help us grasp the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven. That’s part of the reason why Jesus came--- to reveal to us the mysteries of God’s Love; but because that is so far beyond our comprehension, He always tried to find ways that we could at least begin to understand---which is the primary reason why Jesus used Parables.

When Jesus elaborated on the meaning of this particular Parable, He focused on what the obstacles were that got in the way of some of the seed actually bearing fruit: for some it was the scorching heat, for others it was landing on the rocks, or being eaten by the birds, or strangled by the thorns. Unfortunately, that’s also true for us. We’re all very aware that there are obstacles in our own lives that interfere with us using our “ears to hear and to heed” God’s Word. We have our own version of “birds”, “rocks” or “thorns” that kill, scorch, stifle, or choke our good intentions through sinful choices. Perhaps it’s the fears or worries about what’s happening in the world around us; maybe it’s because of the temptations to find short-term pleasure or relief from stress in ways that aren’t healthy; our obstacles could be brought about by goals that we’ve set for ourselves that don’t include God in our lives, or which don’t have the ultimate goal of Heaven in mind.

Beyond that, an additional, and very important point of this Parable is on the Sower and on the Seed. God the Father is the Source of the life within the seeds; Jesus is the Sower; the Holy Spirit provides the necessary nutrients to fertilize and nourish the seeds to come to fruition; and the Seed is us---you and me---every person to ever live---all of humanity. Jesus comes to call all of us to live within the beautiful and amazing “mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven” which He came to establish here and now. God speaks His Word for a purpose, and He intends for His Word to be heard---AND He expects His Word to be heeded, not ignored.

In Jesus’ Parable, the Sower sowed the seed, and then almost overnight, it had sprouted up; some of the seeds were destroyed along the way, while some other seeds “*produced fruit thirty, sixty or even a hundred fold.*” But we don’t “sprout up” overnight; we come to the fullness of life over the course of our lifetime---however long that will be for each of us. If we think of ourselves as a “seed”, we realize that the potential within us continues to unfold and reveal itself as long as we’re alive, if we let it. Some people think that after they get to a certain point in their lives, they’re done growing or changing---they are who they are. But that’s not what God has in mind for us. God has created each of us---He called us into being. We are “the fruit of His Word”. And thanks to Jesus, the Word made Flesh, we have become God’s precious sons and

daughters in Christ thru Baptism. God's Holy Spirit continues to fertilize us, and nurture us, and guide us, through the Church's teachings, and through the Gifts of all the Sacraments, especially this most precious Gift of the Holy Eucharist. As long as we are alive, we can grow more deeply in our love for God, and our love for one another. And God, our Father Who gave us life, is anxiously waiting to see the "fruit" our lives will bear, both here and now, and at the end of our lives at "harvest time"---will it be 30 fold?, sixty fold?, or 100 fold?.

Today would be a good day to stop and reflect on how "spiritually healthy" we are, and what kind of "fruit" we are producing? Perhaps we could take some time to take stock of the distractions in our lives and see what we might be able to do about them; what are those things, circumstances, or choices that are "choking", "scorching", or "snatching" away our ability to more faithfully follow God's ways, or which might be leading us along the wrong paths rather than consciously and courageously following Jesus. Most of all, we need to check our own "spiritual ears"---are we listening to what God is saying to me? Do I understand, and care, about what God wants me to do? Am I willing to allow God to touch my heart to be changed?

Today's Mass focuses our attention on the fact that God's Word has been spoken, not just generically to "the world", but to you and to me. He intends His Word to be heard; He expects His Word to be heeded. So, Jesus has a solution for us. It's simple, but challenging: "*Whoever has ears ought to hear.*" And once we truly hear, then we can heed that Word, which will guide us to the fullness of the potential within us, which brings us to Eternal Life.

God bless you, now and always.