

Roots and Radicals

15th Sunday in Ordinary Time

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Whenever we hear about radicals, we think of people who are extreme in their religious and/or political beliefs. They are uncompromising, opinionated, and usually someone to avoid, especially if we are on the opposite side of the spectrum from them. Radicals are a cause for concern.

But if we look at the word itself, being a radical isn't actually an insult. Radical comes from the root word meaning 'root' in Latin. By definition, a radical is therefore someone who gets to the root of things. Instead of just dealing with the symptoms, they get down to the cause or source. By getting to the root, they are usually firmly planted, know what they are talking about, and can withstand the test of time and criticism.

In our Gospel this weekend, we have the famous parable of the sower and the seed. While something could be said for each of the four scenarios- the seed that fell on the path, in rocky soil, in soil among thorns, and in good soil- I want to call attention to the seed that fell on rocky soil. The Gospel parable states, "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." In his interpretation of this parable, Jesus explains, "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 that falls on rocky ground is perhaps the most dangerous of the four scenarios because it is so deceptive. At least seed falling on a path or among thorns is obvious as to why it will not grow. For the seed in rocky soil, however, at first, it seems like a success. It springs up at once as if it had much potential. Comparing it to us humans, Jesus says there is much initial joy over receiving the Word of God. To all appearances, everything is fine and we might look like a good Christian. But in reality, because we are not allowing our roots to grow, our Christian identity will be shallow and short-lived. Eventually, we will be found out for our deception.

I find what the theologian and faith activist Jim Wallis says about politics appropriate here: ‘don’t go left, don’t go right. Go deep.’ Having roots is not a matter of being on the left or on the right, but of going deeper wherever we are. As Christians, it is about letting the Word of God touch the deepest parts of our being. The Christian journey is a life-long project that involves not only appearances, externals, attendance, rituals, and sacraments, but also inner work like the formation of conscience, sorting through our past baggage that we still are carrying, honesty with ourselves, and allowing God to change our hearts. These latter ones lie below the surface and develop our roots.

Do I work on my roots as much as I do on my appearances?

Radicals are those who are concerned with the roots. The point of today’s liturgy, then, is that *we are to be radicals for the Word of God.*