

12 July 2020

Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Isaiah 55:10-11; Romans 8:18-23; Matthew 13:1-9

The second reading from Romans has some pearls for us to receive. St. Paul says that he considers the suffering of this present age as nothing compared with the glory to come. Indeed, it takes a lot of faith to stay positive sometimes, with our own personal struggles, with our virus situation that has changed life as we know it, and with so much social upheaval. St. Paul follows this by saying that all creation is groaning, like a woman in labor, waiting for redemption, that glorious day when all our lifted up into the glory of God. When there's lots of groaning, and there is, we need lots of hope.

The first reading is hopeful. God is at work; God has a plan. Just as the rain falls from the sky and does not return by evaporation until it has watered the earth and made it fertile to feed a hungry world, so the Word of God that is also sent from heaven will not return until it has made us a fertile people of God, doing God's will and allowing his Holy Spirit to work through us and build a world where people love one another.

And then the Gospel reading. A parable. This first parable Jesus tells according to Matthew. Like I did last week, I want to situate it in Matthew's story. So, all year we're going through Matthew. We left off last week at the end of chapter 11, with "Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest." Today is the beginning of Chapter 13, which means we skipped over all of chapter 12! What's in it? Well, lots! Jesus defends his Apostles against the Pharisees who accuse them of being bad Jews picking grain on the Sabbath. The Sabbath is to help us, not the other way around, he says. Then they attack Jesus for healing a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath, and he fires back that they all would pull one of their livestock out of a ditch on the Sabbath, so why shouldn't he help this man? They accuse him of doing his miracles by the power of the devil. He calls them an evil generation, and he then says that his true aren't his blood relations but whoever does the will of God—these are brother, sister, and mother. So, there's a lot of conflict in chapter 12 that immediately precedes today's account.

This leads me to believe that the parable is about why some people "Get it" and follow Jesus, while others do not. I think it's practical purpose for we who have ears to hear is to create a greater desire in us to be that fertile soil in which the Word of God can grow and bear fruit.

So, ponder this basic question: Do you want to be great for God? Do you want glorify God with your life? Do you want to love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and follow Jesus as he leads you to loving your neighbor as yourself? Do you want to thirst for God and be God's rich soil? That's foundational. You may waver from week to week on how quickly you say yes, but I believe that "yes" is deep inside off of us, in the deepest part of us.

Well, the good news is that you can be! It takes staying in touch with that desire, and a humble, listening and courageous heart. The bad news is that all that can be hard to sustain. We can be like the hardened soil of a path, completely absorbed in our self-centered world so the rain of God just runs off of us. We can have the best of intentions but just get lured away by greed and other temptations like the plant that gets choked by weeds.

This week, **I was more fascinated with the seed that fell on rocky ground**, and grew but withered for lack of **roots**. Here are three meditations:

One of my most common intercessions at daily mass is **for our young people, children, that they might have happy homes, good friends, and that the Gospel may *take root* in their hearts.** What is it to have the Gospel take root in your heart? More than I can say, but I will say it has something to do with seeing the world through the eyes of Jesus, grieving the lack of love in the world and working to put love into it. The Gospel takes root in us when we have those desires and find the courage to act on those desires.

I was tested this week as to how deeply the Gospel is rooted in my heart. Someone stole my wallet out of my car which I foolishly and absentmindedly left unlocked downtown for an hour. I've been celebrating mass each night at 9:00, and when 9:00 rolled around, I saw it as a test. Could I let go of my panic and planning how to cope with losing that stuff for twenty minutes so I could join myself to Christ? Well, to my credit, I tried. I prayed the mass, said the right words, to the end. But my mind was elsewhere. I trust Jesus understood, but I yearned for the day when I could pray the mass with joy and focus even when hard things are going on. That would be a sign that the Gospel is deeply rooted in my heart. That would be so awesome!

Last, I believe that the Gospel takes root in our hearts with the stories of other people take root in our hearts. It is nature to be preoccupied with our own struggles and pursuits. We don't need God to help us focus on ourselves. But do we allow the lives of others to take space in our hearts, to grow roots there? I realize for many of you that is second nature, and I thank anyone out there who has taken me into your heart. For many others, it takes more effort. In April our parish staff met twice a week instead of once with the goal of sharing our life stories with a focus on how our faith has developed. It was really time so well spent as we are vulnerably shared our stories. A month or so later, I panicked because I felt I had lost track of those stories a bit, and was so glad I took a lot of notes.

Like the Word of God, the stories of other people's lives are gifts to us. We can hear them and have them bounce off of a hardened heart, or retain them briefly in a rocky heart, or a thorny heart, or we can treasure them in a fertile heart made receptive by the grace of God and our own desire to be in Communion. **When we are in communion with each other is when we are the best soil for God to work his work in us.**