

July 12, 2020 The Dust Bowl Homily: Across the Southern plains in 1931, the rain stopped falling. For nearly ten years places such as Oklahoma, Texas and Western Kansas experienced extreme drought. Many farmers were adversely affected. Their once fertile fields turned into a wasteland. Black blizzards began. Blinding black dust swept over the plains. Breathing became difficult. It was necessary for children to wear face masks in order to protect themselves from the dust settling in their lungs. One intrepid reporter toured the region and came up with an apt description of the affected places: “the Dust Bowl”.

The late photojournalist Dorothea Lange, left us with a memorable photograph of a young migrant woman and her two small children in the throes of the Depression... Hers is the face of despair. Its title is [“Migrant Mother”](#).

Many families abandoned their home and moved to California. Their plight was dramatically illustrated in John Steinbeck’s classic novel, *“The Grapes of Wrath”*, which was later made into a motion picture. One lesson the farmers learned is that even the best seed cannot grow without good, rich soil.

In the parables of Jesus the theme of division is underscored. It is certainly true of the parable of *“The Sower and the Seed”*, in which the good soil is distinguished from the bad soil. The focus of this familiar story is not so much the sower, who represents Christ, or the seed, which stands for his teaching, but the soil of the human heart for the reception of the seed being sown. The quality of the soil matters for the seed to reach full maturity. The Word of God can develop its potential only if it falls on favorable ground. It is worth noting that in the parable three times out of four the seed does not come to fruition

The Lord answers why the seed does not produce the desired crop. It can fall on a well beaten path, on rocky soil with little depth and among thorns. While it is true that faith is a gift and must be accepted, it is clear that many of his listeners simply did not believe Christ’s message. There is opposition, defections and indifference. Think of the soul as a bone dry field. The seed is useless! One need only consider the growing number of the baptized who have either drifted away from the Church or who no longer take seriously the teachings of Christ.

Jesus came to plant the seed, the Word, in human hearts. Let us ask ourselves: how deep is my faith? What kind of soil am I? What fruit is my life yielding?

Yet we must never be discouraged. The parable ends on a high note. God will get a good return even in the poor world. In spite of all the obstacles, there is a rich harvest. No matter how tired a farmer’s arms are from plowing and weeding, it is not all wasted.

Our blessed Lord was surely aware of those who half-heartedly or incompletely received his teaching. Let us pray that he preserve us from a hardness of heart.

“But the seed sown on rich soil is the one who hears the Word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields a hundred or sixty or thirtyfold.” (Mt. 13:23)

Amen!