

Fr. Curtis Miller

March 20-21, 2021

Homily for the 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent

I'm not a gardener, but I'm told that it's about time to start planting seeds. I've heard from some people that they are starting seedlings inside now. If the seed is going to become a plant, it must first be buried in the dirt and die to its old self. It cannot remain just a seed if it is to become something new and better.

Maybe that has been our experience during this Lent. By our penitential practices, we die to our old selves so that we might experience new spiritual growth. Maybe we've sacrificed time we used to spend on entertainment so that we have more time to pray. Maybe we've given more to charity from the money we saved by not buying that daily cup of coffee at the gas station. It's not about denying ourselves just for the sake of the denial. Rather it's about dying to ourselves to produce new life. As our first reading and the responsorial psalm remind us, God wants to make a new covenant with us and give us a new heart. In order for that to happen, we have to allow the old in our lives to die, to make room for the new.

Jesus uses the image of the seed in today's Gospel when He says that "unless the grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it will remain just a single grain. But if it dies, it will produce much fruit." Jesus was also referring to His fast-approaching passion, death, and resurrection. By sacrificing His life for us on the cross, Jesus saved us from sin and death, reaping a harvest of salvation. We should consciously unite our Lenten penances and the other sufferings in our lives to Jesus' one perfect sacrifice on the cross. That way, we won't be making these sacrifices begrudgingly, but rather willingly, even joyfully, because we will know that they will ultimately lead us to the resurrection to eternal life.

I don't know if you saw it in the news this past week, but archeologists in Israel have just discovered new Dead Sea Scrolls. These are ancient writings from the time of Jesus, found on pieces of scrolls, which give insights into the religious beliefs and customs of the time. The first scrolls were discovered accidentally by a shepherd boy in a cave in Israel in the 1940s. The newly discovered scrolls were found in a cavern known as the Cave of Horrors, which can only be reached by rappelling down a sheer cliff face.

One of the scrolls reads: "These are the things you are to do: Speak truth to one another, render true and perfect justice in your gates, and do not contrive evil against one another." Commenting on this discovery, one late night comedian said, "That's beautiful, although I will admit I don't know if it was worth it, rappelling down a sheer cliff into a cave of horrors for. If I'm going down into a cave, I want to find a treasure chest or the secret to eternal life, not a piece of paper that says, 'Don't lie.'" I already knew that!"

Obviously he was joking, but what he misses here is the same thing that people miss when they don't come to Mass or read the Bible. They think it's boring because

they are just going to hear or read the same basic ideas they already heard before, not something remarkable like a treasure or the secret to eternal life. But the teachings of our faith, revealed to us by God Himself are precisely that: a treasure and the secret to eternal life. These teachings are the preserved wisdom, entrusted to us by God Himself, and faithfully passed down to us, generation by generation. And like a language spoken by fewer and fewer people, it could one day be in danger of being known by only a few. Biblical literacy and knowledge of the Church's teachings is declining in our modern world. Too many of us take it for granted as stuff we've already heard, but let's not fall for that temptation.

Rather, when we come here to Mass, let us listen attentively to the readings, and come with hearts open to receive God's graces, especially to receive the Body of Jesus in the Eucharist. We need this regular refresher of Word and Sacrament for our souls. And between the times we come to Mass, we can take the Bible or the Catechism or another spiritual book off of the bookshelf, and drink in more of the wisdom and truth that will strengthen and nourish our souls.

When we have done this, we can't just keep it to ourselves. We must share it with others and strive to live it out in our lives in a way that is attractive and inspiring to other people. We all hear the same words of the Scriptures and the teachings of the Church, but each of us is going to live it out in a different and unique way. That's why no two saints are exactly alike. St. Therese was inspired to live a life of fervent prayer, while St. Mother Teresa was led to devote her life to serving the poor. When God plants the seed of His Word in our hearts, if we are willing to tend that seed and care for that plant, then we will grow up to become part of God's vibrant garden, showing forth the splendor of His glory to all the world.