

Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time / Year A / July 12, 2020 (Fr. Giese)

We have a used clothing bin here on our church parking lot. It used to take two to three weeks for it to fill up. Now, with the Coronavirus shutdown it fills up every week. Apparently, one of the things that people have been doing while spending more time at home than before is to go through their clothing and take out what they are no longer wearing, haven't worn in a long time, or no longer fits. I see the cars pull up to the bin throughout the day and it isn't only our bin. The company that takes care of ours has many of them in the Mid-Atlantic area and they have said they are having difficulty keeping up with all the excess clothes people are putting in all the bins. However, it isn't only clothing that people accumulate in excess. It is also stuff. There are companies you can call to take away junk, whatever you have that you no longer want. They also are doing a lot of business these days as people try to get rid of the clutter they have accumulated in their homes over the years.

Physical things like clothing and furniture and toys and books are not the only things that can become clutter. There are a lot of other things too, that can fill up our lives in just the same way that clothes can fill up a closet or stuff can fill up a garage to the point where there is no more room for anything else. People can fill up their lives with any number of things, especially non-essential things, to the point that doing everything they want to do becomes a challenge, and even presents a danger to leading a God-centered life by choking off or crowding out the place that should be occupied by God. Jesus referred to this in the parable about the man who sowed seed and why it doesn't all grow. Some seed, Jesus said, fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it. In his later explanation to the apostles he said that the seed that fell among thorns is the one who hears the word but then worldly anxiety and the lure of riches choke the word and it bears no fruit.

What should we learn from this? Well, one thing is that is that the action of choking the seed and keeping it from growing is something that can actually be seen, bit by bit. Near one of the rectory doors there is a shrub and at its base there are some vines that grow. I've tried every year to pull them out but have never succeeded. Each year they start growing into the shrub and up the steps. I could see it happening this year too and I kept saying I will get to it. However, by

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the time I got around to it they had grown a great deal and were making their way through the door and into the porch.

In the same way the things that choke off our life in God keep growing. The effects can be seen and even felt; the absence of prayer, longer times between confession, less frequent attendance at Mass, fewer moments of reflection on God, greater comfort with sin, lesser effort put into family relationships, and more. Eventually, the life of faith is choked and maybe completely. So, we must be on our guard, and not let the weeds win. We have to cut them back and let the seed of faith grow in our hearts and bear fruit.

Admittedly, that takes effort, which is why I let the vines grow so long this year they were growing into the house. So, the question is, “why should I make the effort to cut back on the clutter in my life and make space for God? What do I get if I do that?” To start with, companionship and friendship with Jesus Christ? It means that you are never all on your own. Jesus is with you to strengthen you, console you, heal you, listen to you, carry you, nourish you, lead you, bless you, and feed you. If you make the effort to clear out the clutter in your life and make space for your faith in God then you get to go through life as a friend of the Son of God who loves you enough to die for you. Is that worth the effort?

Also, you get to start over again whenever you need to and who doesn't need that? Yes, it takes effort but giving Jesus your sins is a fresh start, each time, a new beginning. With faith in God there can always be one.

And if I make the effort to make room for God in my life, to let the seed of faith grow in my life, then I don't have to make as much effort in the rest of my life to figure everything out. God has already done that for me. When God says not to do something because bad things will follow, I can trust that that will always be true, every single time. So, the person with the word of God growing in him or her doesn't waste time being hurt and injured or trying to repair hurts and injuries which require a huge amount of effort. When you love God above all things and your neighbor as yourself, that is a good way to go through life. You enjoy life a whole lot more because your relationship to others; spouse, parents, sibling, friends, coworkers and even strangers will be healthier and more fruitful.

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You also get this when you make the effort to make space for God to grow in your life; you know who you are at your most fundamental level, at your core. You are a disciple of Jesus Christ, someone who belongs to God. At whatever point in life you are and whatever may be happening in the world or in your life, you know precisely who you are. You are a Christian, claimed by the Son of God by the blood he shed for you.

All of these things and more are your if you hear the word of God, and keep it.