

“Whoever has ears to hear ought to hear” (Lk 8:8). Jesus insists on the importance of properly hearing the word of God. Since the apostles did not understand the parable about the sower and the seeds, Jesus has to spell it out for them. There are four types of listeners Jesus has in mind.

First, those who hear the Word of God but do not accept it. The devil enters into the heart and the person believes the devil rather than Jesus. Biblically, we think of the Apostle Judas. “The devil had already induced Judas, son of Simon the Iscariot, to hand him over” (Jn 13:2). Although our bible translation uses the word ‘induced,’ literally this translates into: “The devil put into the heart that Judas should hand him over” (Note to 13:2). We might liken Judas to a suicide bomber who kills innocent people while professing to believe they have some induced insight that they are doing good when they are in fact perpetrating a horrible evil.

A second type of listener are those who believe for a little while but fall away because of persecution. “Those on rocky ground are the ones who, when they hear, receive the word with joy, but they have no root; they believe only for a time and fall away in time of temptation” (Lk 8:13). Apostasy was a serious problem in the early church. Under persecution, many shied away from the cross and took a course of less resistance by recanting their belief in Jesus and pledging allegiance to false gods.

God does not give up so easily even when the seed falls on rocky ground. John, in fact, wrote the Book of Revelation to bolster the faith of the church during a period of persecution. Jesus who resisted all of the temptations of the devil taught us to pray the Lord’s prayer. “All believers ask in the Lord’s Prayer not to be led into “temptation”, so as not to risk falling away.”ⁱ

A third type of listener are those whose faith is stifled by worldly concerns. Jesus asks a number of people to follow him, but their worldly concerns outweigh their desire to follow Jesus and carry his cross. One man objects at the sacrifice that must be made, another wants to attend to family matters, and a third claims: “‘I will follow you, Lord, but first let me say farewell to my family at home.’ [To him] Jesus said, ‘No one who sets a hand to the plow and looks to what was left behind is fit for the kingdom of God’” (Lk 9: 57-62). In addition to these anxieties, Jesus also cautions about the danger of riches and the need for detachment from wealth lest one overlook the needs of the poor.ⁱⁱ

A fourth type of listener is one who whole-heartedly responds to the word and produces an abundant bounty of fruit. “Unlike the first group, they believe and are saved, as they embrace it with a generous and good heart. In contrast to the second group, who fall away amid trial, these are the ones marked by perseverance. Whereas those in the third group fail to produce mature fruit, these are the ones who bear fruit and are blessed with a hundredfold yield.”ⁱⁱⁱ

We should not lose heart if we are slow in accepting God’s Word when we first hear of it. Using the Apostle Peter as an example, his denial of Christ on Good Friday follows the example of seed sown on rocky ground. Peter was deathly afraid of standing up for Jesus. Following his remorse and repentance, the Lord strengthens him with the Holy Spirit and the seed takes root ready to multiply a hundredfold. On Pentecost Sunday, Peter shares the Good News about the resurrection of Jesus and the forgiveness of sins and “those who accepted his message [on Pentecost Sunday] were baptized, and about three thousand persons were added that day” (Acts 2:41).

How often do you hear something but misinterpret what the speaker intended? A simple lesson from the parable of the sower and the seeds is to always proclaim the Good News in good times and in bad. One never knows how and when the Spirit can help a poor listener to overcome their fears and produce fruit a hundredfold.

ⁱ Gadenz, Pablo T.. The Gospel of Luke, Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture. Pg. 158.

ⁱⁱ Ibid, 159.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid 159-160.