

3rd Wednesday | 2021

Hebrews 10:11-18

Every priest stands daily at his ministry, offering frequently those same sacrifices that can never take away sins.

But this one offered one sacrifice for sins, and took his seat forever at the right hand of God; now he waits until his enemies are made his footstool.

For by one offering he has made perfect forever those who are being consecrated. The Holy Spirit also testifies to us, for after saying:

This is the covenant I will establish with them

after those days, says the Lord:

“I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them upon their minds,”

he also says:

*Their sins and their evildoing
I will remember no more.*

Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer offering for sin.

Psalm 110:1, 2, 3, 4

The LORD said to my Lord: “Sit at my right hand

till I make your enemies your footstool.”

The scepter of your power the LORD will stretch forth from Zion:

“Rule in the midst of your enemies.”

“Yours is princely power in the day of your birth, in holy splendor;

before the daystar, like the dew, I have

begotten you.”

The LORD has sworn, and he will not repent:

“You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek.”

Mark 4:1-20

On another occasion, Jesus began to teach by the sea.

A very large crowd gathered around him so that he got into a boat on the sea and sat down.

And the whole crowd was beside the sea on land.

*And he taught them at length in parables, and in the course of his instruction he said to them,
“Hear this! A sower went out to sow.*

And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and the birds came and ate it up.

Other seed fell on rocky ground where it had little soil. It sprang up at once because the soil was not deep. And when the sun rose, it was scorched and it withered for lack of roots.

Some seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it and it produced no grain.

*And some seed fell on rich soil and produced fruit. It came up and grew and yielded thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold.”
He added, “Whoever has ears to hear ought to hear.”*

*And when he was alone,
those present along with the Twelve
questioned him about the parables.*

*He answered them, "The mystery of the
Kingdom of God has been granted to you.
But to those outside everything comes in
parables, so that*

*they may look and see but not perceive,
and hear and listen but not
understand,
in order that they may not be converted
and be forgiven."*

*Jesus said to them, "Do you not
understand this parable? Then how will
you understand any of the parables?"*

*The sower sows the word. These are the
ones on the path where the word is sown.*

*As soon as they hear, Satan comes at
once and takes away the word sown in
them.*

*And these are the ones sown on rocky
ground who, when they hear the word,
receive it at once with joy. But they have
no roots; they last only for a time. Then
when tribulation or persecution comes
because of the word, they quickly fall
away.*

*Those sown among thorns are another
sort. They are the people who hear the
word, but worldly anxiety, the lure of
riches, and the craving for other things
intrude and choke the word, and it bears
no fruit.*

*But those sown on rich soil are the ones
who hear the word and accept it
and bear fruit thirty and sixty and a
hundredfold."*



The Parable of the Sower. This is a classic like other famous parables such as the Mustard Seed, the Lost Sheep and the Great Feast.

If you aren't familiar with these Gospel parables, may I encourage you to find them in your Bible. They are a delight and will make you think... inside out... and right side up.

A Gospel parable has a homey charm that packs a punch. Madeleine Boucher in her book, *The Parables*, defines more precisely and clearly for us.

In modern usage the word should be, and usually is, reserved for those stories which are drawn from ordinary, everyday life, which have a religious or moral lesson conveyed indirectly, and which are intended to convince or persuade, to bring the hearer to decision or action.ⁱ

It is the role of your preacher on Sundays to help break open the Word, the Scripture of the day. You have the right to expect that, due to their studies prior to ordination, that they might have a clue about what they are talking about, that they can provide some historical or textual criticism, a connection with Tradition and relevance to modern daily living. And so, we who preach prayerfully, try to be up to that expectation. We try not to over-explain a story out of Jesus' own mouth. It'd be hubris to think we could do much better or be more insightful than Jesus' own words.

There is also with this Parable of the Sower the additional observation that after Jesus shares the parable in public that he goes on and explains it line by line to his disciples afterwards.

I had a pastor step up to the ambo on the 15th Sunday of Ordinary Time (Year A) when the Matthew version of this story is proclaimed. He told the congregation that Jesus had already given his homily on the parable to his disciples. My pastor said he had no expectation of doing better than Jesus's homily... and so didn't... give a homily that is.

I'm no more insightful than my pastor and so... I won't either. Go ahead and reread the parable (Mark 4:3-8) and then read Jesus' "homily" on it (Mark 4:11-20).

There is a part of this reading, however, that is hard for me. It is where in our story that Jesus explains how people do not understand his parables. He refers to the prophet, Isaiah:

*they may look and see but not perceive,
and hear and listen but not understand,
in order that they may not be converted
and be forgivenⁱⁱ*

Now why would anybody not want to be understood? Doesn't Jesus want everybody to receive the Word of everlasting life?

This reference to Isaiah is steeped in the determinism of the Old Testament.ⁱⁱⁱ God determines the outcome of good and evil. It doesn't harmonize well with our 21st Century understanding of fairness of who gets picked and who doesn't, based on their own merits.

The reason that they see, but not perceive... and listen, but not understand is not because they weren't good enough or insightful enough. It is because they did not have a relationship with Jesus. It is our willing acceptance of Jesus' offer of himself that we perceive, that we understand and that we are saved from ourselves, from evil and from death. It is Jesus who saves.

We've been endowed with the divine character of free will. We can, and often do, choose other than Jesus. Sadly, through selfishness we play into the ambitions of the Evil One.

I cannot rely on my intelligence for my salvation. You see, there are things that are offered for my appropriation that just don't make sense.

Jesus is born of a virgin. Jesus is true God and true man. The Trinity is three persons in the unity of one God. Jesus is present, body and blood, soul and divinity, in the transubstantiated bread and wine.

How is it I can believe in such?

If I was standing in front of you holding a green ball and told you it was red, you would scoff at me. If I offered you \$100 and told you it was red, you'd tell me off. If I offered you \$1,000,000 and told you it was red, you might agree with me out loud that it was red, but there is no amount of money I could give you that could cause you to see anything but green.

So how then can I say I believe in the virgin birth, true nature of Jesus, the Trinity and the Holy Eucharist? I have no power in myself to force myself to believe.

Back in college I had a Jewish friend that was enthralled with Catholicism. We'd have long talks at the dorm. He wished he could believe in Jesus so badly that he would cry out. Yet, alas, he said he couldn't make himself believe despite wanting to. (Now I have every confidence that such a sincere seeker walks closely with God.)

How can I believe? I do believe. But how?

It is a gift of God, a gift won by Jesus on the cross. It is his victory over death that saves me from death. It is God's action, not mine.

I have the will to reject it. In my selfishness I twist this way and that from God's will. But, I do have the will to accept it, live it and, in Christ, be a child of the divine family.

I do want to perceive.
I do want to understand.
I do want to convert.
I do want to be forgiven.

When I don't ignore Him... I do so by the grace of God.



ⁱ Madeleine I. Boucher, *The Parables*, Michael Glazier, Inc., p. 17

ⁱⁱ Isaiah 6:9-10

ⁱⁱⁱ John R. Donahue, S.J. & Daniel J. Harrington, S.J., *The Gospel of Mark, Sacra Pagina*, p.145