

***ctkAlive!* Scripture Study**

15th Sunday in Ordinary Time 2020—A Cycle Readings



“The Angelus” (betw. 1857-1859)
[Jean-Francois Millet](#)

Note: For your convenience and to broaden your benefit from this and all sessions in this series, we have added links to books, authors, and other references mentioned in the text.

Caution: *Links to the internet are like rabbits dashing across a hunter’s path. Instinct says, “Leave the reflection and chase after that link!” Instead, we suggest waiting until you have followed the entire reflection. Then take all the time you wish to follow these interesting and educational links.*

Exception: *In the course of the lesson, you may have an opportunity to watch or listen to a relevant song or video.*

Opening Prayer

By Rev. Christine Longhurst—Pastor, Teacher, Writer Source: [re:Worship](#)
(adapted for use here)

Prayer

(based on the parable of the sower in Matthew 13:1-9)

O God,

I come before your presence with expectation,
hungry for an encounter with You,
eager to hear Your Word.

Open my eyes and ears to the presence of Your Holy Spirit.
May the seeds of Your Word scattered in my life today
fall on fertile soil.

May they take root in my heart,
and produce an abundant harvest
of good words and deeds.

I pray this in the name of Jesus Christ,
my teacher and Lord. Amen.

Introduction to the 15th Sunday in Ordinary Time Scriptures

This weekend's readings express our belief that God as Divine Sower, who equips each person with all they need to live "fruitful" lives. Yes, from the moment of my birth to the instant of my grand farewell to all I have known and done on earth. It may be difficult for me put myself in the shoes of an agrarian family. I live and work in an urban/suburban culture and locale.

In the final lines of Isaiah 55: 10-11, I will hear: "The word [seed] that goes forth from my mouth: will not return to me idle, but it shall accomplish my will."

And in Psalm 65: 10-14, "The seed that falls on good ground will yield a fruitful harvest."

Then in Romans 8: 18-23, "I consider that the suffering of our present life cannot be compared with the glory that will be revealed and given to us."

Finally, in Matthew 13: 1-23, I find these words at the heart of the great parable of the sower: "The sower went out to sow . . . some seeds fell along the path . . . other seeds fell on rocky ground . . . other seeds fell among the thistles . . . still other seeds fell on good soil. . ."

[The Roman Lectionary allows shortening this reading to verses 1-9.]

Those of us living in a dot-com/cellphone society are left to understand the sower-seed parable and its application to our lives as best we can. Undaunted, we delve into these Scriptures, hoping to gain insight into God's way of sowing in our personal and familial fields.

First Reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah (55: 1-11)

Come here, all you who are thirsty, come to the water! All who have no money, come! Yes, without money and at no cost, buy and drink wine and milk. Why spend money on what is not food and labor for what does not satisfy? Listen to me, and you will eat well; you will enjoy the richest of fare. Incline your ear and come to me; listen, that your soul may live.

I will seek Yahweh while he may be found;
call to him while he is near.
Let the wicked abandon his way,
let him forsake his thoughts;
let him turn to Yahweh for he will have mercy,
for our God is generous in forgiving.
For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
my ways are not your ways, says Yahweh.

For as the heavens are above the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways,
and my thoughts above your thoughts.
As the rain and the snow come down from the heavens
and do not return till they have watered the earth,
making it yield seed for the sower and food for others to eat,
so is my word that goes forth out of my mouth:
it will not return to me idle,
but it shall accomplish my will,
the purpose for which it has been sent.

Personal Reflection

“Come here, all you who are thirsty, come to the water! All who have no money, come! Yes, without money and at no cost, buy and drink wine and milk.”
In these words of Isaiah, we hear the future words of Jesus in the Beatitudes (Matthew 5), “Blessed are the poor . . . the hungry . . . the meek,” etc. If I am honest with myself, these words of Isaiah and Jesus may go counter to my personal “beatitudes”—blessed are those who have the means to live comfortably . . . who can take running water and electricity as a birthright.

— *When I come across homeless people on the street or under a freeway, how hard is it for me to see in them the “blessed” of Jesus? When did I have a personal encounter with a homeless person? Where was it? How can I describe my experience.*

Isaiah’s Yahweh is unselfish. All divine blessings are gifts for others.
“As the rain and the snow come down from the heavens and do not return till they have watered the earth, making it yield seed for the sower and food for others to eat, so is my word that goes forth out of my mouth. . . .”

— *“ . . . food for others to eat. . . .” In my private moments of self-awareness, how generous have I been in sharing what I have with others? When did I do a good act in of my own self-interest, more than to help someone in need? (Replay that inner “tape” now.) Who was the “other”? What were the circumstances? How would I behave if I encountered a similar set of circumstances today?*

Antiphon: Psalm 65 (10-14)

A song of springtime: a psalm of worship.

The seed that falls on good ground will yield a fruitful harvest.

You water the land and care for it,
enriching it with natural resources.

God's stream is filled with water;
so you prepare the earth to give us its fruits.

The seed that falls on good ground will yield a fruitful harvest.

You drench the furrows in the land and level the ridges;
you soften the soil with showers and bless its crops.
You crown the year with your goodness;
abundance flows everywhere.

The seed that falls on good ground will yield a fruitful harvest.

The deserts have become pastureland,
the hills are clothed with gladness;
the meadows, covered with flocks,
the valleys, decked with grain—
they shout and sing for joy.

The seed that falls on good ground will yield a fruitful harvest.

Personal Reflection

The God of the psalmist believed played an active role in people's lives.

— *What sort of God does the psalmist address in this passage? If I were to rewrite these words in Psalm 65 from my own life experience, how would my psalm go?*

— *If there was a time when I was not generous with time, money, possessions . . . what were the circumstances? How did I justify my decision, my action at that time? If today God presented me with a similar set of circumstances, how would I respond?*

Second Reading: From St. Paul's Letter to the Romans (8: 18-23)

"I consider that the suffering of our present life cannot be compared with the glory that will be revealed and given to us. All creation is eagerly expecting the birth, in glory of the children of God. For, if now the created world was unable to attain its purpose, this did not come from itself, but from the one who subjected it. But it is not without hope; for even the created world, will be freed from this fate of death, and share the freedom and glory of the children of God.

"We know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pangs of birth. Not creation alone, but even ourselves; although the Spirit was given to us, as a foretaste of what we are to receive, we groan in our innermost being, eagerly awaiting the day, when God will give us full rights and rescue our bodies as well."

Personal Reflection

St. Paul knew that the Roman Empire and the city of Rome itself existed at the fickle pleasure of Emperor Nero. The apostle foresaw a future clash between the all-powerful Emperor and vulnerable Christian communities. That persecution occurred around the year 64 AD/CE. Nero scapegoated Christians, accusing them of setting fire to a large swatch of the city of Rome. Both great and foundational Apostles. Paul and Peter, lost their lives around the time of that purge.

In his encyclical on the care of the earth (*Laudato Si'*), Pope Francis does everything but come out directly and say that creation will not perish with our world and known universe: “Even the created world, will be freed from this fate of death and share the freedom and glory of the children of God.”

— *Is Paul waxing poetic about the eternal existence of creation? Or, as some of the top Catholic theologians hold today, is he stating a belief that “salvation” applies to all forms of creation? What is my opinion about that? What ramifications do I foresee, if Pope Francis’ targeted words are literally true as he wrote them?*

— *How strongly do I believe, as Paul did, that “the suffering of [my] present life cannot be compared with the glory that will be revealed and given to us”? Why do I believe this?*

Proclamation from the Gospel Matthew (13: 1-23)

“It happened that, Jesus was walking through the wheat fields on a Sabbath. His disciples were hungry; and they began to pick some heads of wheat, to crush and to eat the grain.

“When the Pharisees noticed this, they said to Jesus, ‘Look at your disciples! They are doing what is prohibited on the Sabbath!’

“Jesus answered, ‘Have you not read what David did, when he and his men were hungry? He went into the House of God, and they ate the bread offered to God, though neither he nor his men had the right to eat it, but only the priests. And have you not read in the law, how, on the Sabbath, the priests in the temple desecrate the Sabbath, yet they are not guilty? I tell you, there is *greater* than the temple here. If you really knew the meaning of the words: ‘It is mercy I want, not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the innocent. Besides, the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.”

“Jesus then left that place and went into one of their synagogues. A man was there with a paralyzed hand, and the people who wanted to bring a charge against Jesus asked him, ‘Is it permitted to heal on the Sabbath?’

“He said to them, ‘What if one of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath? Will you not take hold of your sheep and lift it out? Is a human being less worthy of help than a sheep? Therefore, it is permitted to do good on the Sabbath.’

“Then Jesus said to the man, ‘Stretch out your arm.’ He stretched it out, and it was completely restored, as sound as the other one.

“Then the Pharisees went out and made plans to get rid of Jesus. As Jesus was aware of their plans, he left that place. Many people followed him, and he cured all who were sick. But, he gave them strict orders not to make him known.

“In this way, Isaiah’s prophecy was fulfilled:

“Here is my servant, whom I have chosen; the one I love, and with whom I am pleased. I will put my spirit upon him; and he will announce my judgment to the nations. He will not argue or shout, nor will his voice be heard in the streets. The bruised reed he will not crush, nor snuff out the smoldering wick until he brings justice to victory, and in him, all the nations will put their hope.”

Personal Reflection

Throughout the gospels, men of the Pharisee branch of Judaism kept a close eye on Jesus day and night, waiting and hoping for opportunities to catch him in the act of violating one of their hundreds of laws and practices. Their goal? Get rid of Jesus.

— *When have I had the experience of being watched closely (and judged negatively) by someone (parent, spouse, teacher, employer, coach . . .) as Jesus was “under the microscope” of his enemies? How did it feel? How did I react? How does it affect my life even today?*

Read again the quote from Isaiah in the final paragraph of the Gospel reading. Jesus recalled these lines from the prophet and identified himself in them.

— *As I reflect on these verses, what resemblance to Jesus do I find in my spirit, lifestyle, values, actions, faith, and loves? In what area(s) of my life do I need to improve to be more in sync with Isaiah’s “measuring stick” of right living?*

Shelter-in-Place

We (especially the *extroverts* among us) are weary of our lived experience as “defensive” citizens of the world. Yet, the current upswing in covid-19 cases and deaths has resulted in tighter restrictions on our freedom of movement and socialization.

— *What personal steps am I taking to protect others and myself during this time?*

— *If the shelter-in-place rules have cut or curtailed my ability to work and earn a living to pay expenses, how am I feeling about my life and my future prospects at this moment? Who or what helps me to be patient and to trust in God’s Providence, during this challenging time? [Write about your feelings and lived experience during the journaling time (below).]*

Journaling Prompts

Take some time to write about the insights you've gained from reflecting on the readings for the 15th Sunday of Ordinary Time and the current social demands and restrictions. Suggested prompts:

— *What is the first thought that comes to mind?*

We mustn't simply be grateful "recipients" of God's good gifts. We need to be "givers," too.

— *What difference will this week's Scriptures and current societal events make in how I think, live, love—and "give back"—during the week ahead?*

Jesus invites me to "give a cup of cold water" to someone who needs it.

— *Is there someone who has been on my mind lately and would truly appreciate a phone call or an e-mail/text message from me? Can I resolve this week to make that contact?*

Questions

Feel free to send any questions or comments you might have to ctkAlive@ctkph.org

Preview of Next Session

Readings for the 16th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Wisdom of Solomon 12: 13, 16-19 "A righteous person must love his/her human fellows."

Psalms 86: 5-6, 9-10, 15-16 "Lord, you are good and forgiving."

Romans 8: 26-27 "The Spirit helps us in our weakness."

Matthew 13: 24-43 "The kingdom of heaven is like . . . a man who sowed good seed in his field . . . a mustard seed . . . the yeast a woman took and hid in three measures of flour."

For Inspirational Reading / Listening

Great post-4th of July reading:

[America's Prophet: Moses and the American Story](#) by [Bruce Feiler](#)

— Biblical historian, Bruce Feiler, shows how Moses and the Exodus story have been quoted and compared to the American Story from those first arrived on the

Mayflower, to the founding of our nation, to the present day. A revelatory read in these times when our democracy seems fragile, even in danger!

— Also by Bruce Feiler . . .

[*Abraham: A Journey to the Heart of Three Faiths*](#);

[*Walking the Bible: A Journey by Land Through the Five Books of Moses*](#)

[*Where God Was Born: A Daring Adventure Through The Bible's Greatest Stories*](#)

(I have read these books and highly recommend them to those wanting to learn more about pre-Christian history and faith—AJG)

Song: [Seeds](#) by [Kathy Mattea](#)

Closing Prayer

By Lisa Ann Moss Degrenia, Source: [Revlisad](#)
(adapted for use here)

We Cry, “Glory!”

Lord of Life
You sow extravagantly
Generously
Some would cry, “Foolish”
I cry, “Glory!”
You sow your Word
Your Promises
Your Salvation
Your Self
“Glory!” to your grace and mercy
You save me from the stealing
The shallow
The choking thorns
“Glory!” to your deliverance and power
You make my life good rich soil
Ready for your seed
In you, I grow up and increase and yield
“Glory!” to your goodness and faithfulness
I rejoice in you and in being your harvest
Help me to ever bear your good and lasting fruit
for the honor and glory of your name.
Amen

The Sunday readings are from [Christian Community Bible: Catholic Pastoral Edition](#)

© 1999, Bernardo Hurault and Patricia Grogan, FCJ. Imprimatur:

Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines

Questions and Commentaries © [Alfred J. Garrotto](#)

(follow the link above to the novel *Bishop Myriel: In His Own Words*)