

Homily Notes for Sunday, July 12, 2020, 15th A O.T.
Readings: Isa 55:10-11, Ps 65:10 – 14, Rom 8:18-23, Mt 13:1-23

1. Summary: Focus is on the importance of hearing and obeying God's prophets who are proclaiming the powerful Word of God.

2. This first reading is the strongest statement in the Old Testament about the power of the Word of God. He affirms that "Just as ... the rain and snow come down and do not return there till they have watered the earth, making it fertile and fruitful... so shall my Word be... my Word shall not return to me void, but shall do my will, achieving the end for which I sent it." Where can we go to obtain "truth" concerning life and salvation? We should have confidence in the power of God's Word. This is the task of the prophet, to teach and preach the Word of God so that the people might respond and be saved.

3. In the second reading, St. Paul reminds us that suffering is part of creation (seeds must fall in the dirt and die in order to produce a fruitful life), and that suffering and death produce redemption. He is expectantly waiting for his eternal reward, as he has sowed the word of God diligently and suffered for the Lord. It is this attitude that many of the martyrs held as they faced a violent and painful death.

4. In today's Gospel we have guidelines for how to grow as disciples (See parallels in Mark 4 and Luke 8). What Jesus says here underlines our responsibility to be ready to accept God's grace, to hear and to understand the Word of God and to respond to it (Consider Jesus' reference to Isaiah (Mt 13:14-15, see Isa 6:9-13).

5. I find this last passage from Isaiah to be a frightening but powerful lesson. Please take this home and read these to understand the consequences of not having faith. God can be angry and close our ears so we cannot hear. He may darken our minds so that we will not understand. We need to pray to Him and discipline ourselves, so we never arrive at such a desperate state. Let us use these guidelines to evaluate our own quality of discipleship, but also how to evangelize others, especially our children.

6. The basic point of this parable is that Jesus is explaining to his disciples that, precisely because they have faith in him and want to have a good grasp of his teaching, they will be given a deeper understanding of divine truths. But those who do not "follow him" will later lose interest in the things of God and will grow ever more blind, *even to the point of the destruction and desolation of their culture, their people and their way of life.*

7. The parable gives us guidelines for being fruitful disciples. God gives grace, and man freely responds to that grace. The way that we respond to that grace exposes the kind of soil that we are. And we can be responsible for the kind of soil we are. We need to care for our soil type and think about how the soil type of others may affect their relationship to God. See additional comments on soil and its care in the attachment to the text on Facebook and on our website. Why is it valuable to be a fruitful disciple of Jesus Christ? What makes this worthwhile to us?

8. This, then, raises the issue of respecting and listening to the prophets that God sends to us. It, then, calls us to be prophets to our family and those around us. St. Paul lays out the issue in Romans 10:11ff.

For the scripture says, “No one who believes in him will be put to shame...” Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” But how can they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how can they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone to preach? And how can people preach unless they are sent?... Thus faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ.

9. How clear it is that we need prophets, both in our society and within the Church. First, in the Church, we need priestly and diaconal vocations because we need people with good training so that they can preach the Word. This is why only priests and deacons can preach in Church. They are the ones who should be qualified to do so. But in the Church is it only priests and deacons who are called to be prophets? Not at all! Every baptized person has been given these three powers, at least at a minimal level, prophet, priest, and king. Where are all of us to exercise this power of prophecy? Certainly, in the leadership of our family! How else? How about in guidance and correction of those who are ignorant or misguided? Are we not called on to correct each other (at least gently)?

10. How about in our society? Prophets are needed to lead the society in godly ways. For example, in this coronavirus conflict, I think I see some prophets. You may test my words here. Concerning hydroxychloroquine as a treatment for COVID-19. It was shown early in the course of this disease that the French had found that hydroxychloroquine was effective (100% in first group) in curing this virus. But President Trump picked up on it and opposition arose. Poorly designed studies appeared, proposing dangers and problems where none had been before. Powerful people in Big Pharma attacked it because it was so cheap (\$13 vrs. \$3100 per treatment). The false studies had to be withdrawn. A few physicians, along with Laura Ingram, tried to give witness to the power of this drug to cure. But their posts were taken down. The medical establishment threatened their medical licenses and their very work. Pharmacies refused to fill prescriptions for this purpose! But some battle on.

11. I want to make a prophecy. If the reports I hear from my physician friends about this drug and its remarkable power to heal this disease, then those who are blocking its use and threatening these physicians would be guilty of being accessories to tens of thousands of deaths, either out of greed, desire for political power, or hatred of a particular person. What do you think will be the judgment of God upon them?

12. This is why I am attempting to communicate to you on this issue. I believe my analysis above is correct. I believe that there is greed in “big pharma” leading people to suppress this info. I believe there are political agendas and personal hate out there causing this situation. I believe that elements of Marxist, communist thought are out there trying to bring down our society and its godly foundations. All of that is profoundly evil! Therefore, because I care about my family and about you, I feel that I must communicate this to you. You must then decide what is true and what is wise. This is why I have sought out the permission of certain physicians to put their names and contact information in the bulletin. You can use it if you wish. I certainly will if needs be. My Tyler doctor doesn’t believe in this treatment. Will I go where I believe I can be best healed? Certainly!

13. But, finally, on a more directly biblical level, concerning matters of our salvation, I am very frustrated because it seems to me that many do not listen to the warnings of God and his guidelines for our lives. You may be in church but are you really listening to obey and to do the will of God? The consequence of this conflict over COVID-19 can lead to physical death. But failure to listen to God’s Word will lead to a situation like that in Isaiah 6:9-13 where your hearts will be hardened and your minds darkened and then, at some point, you will not be able to understand and to be saved. Is

this the position you wish to be in? That is the challenge of the readings today as they appear at this time in our society. What will be your response?

Some additional reflections on the Parable of the Sower

Let's look at what Jesus says about the kinds of soils.

7. The hard soil represents those who hear and who do not understand (or who do not care to work hard to understand it). In this case, the Gospel, the Word is not received and the evil one snatches it away before it can have any effect or produce any fruit. These, also, apparently do not care to protect or to value this "word they have heard."

8. The rocky ground represents the superficial person who hears the Word and immediately receives it with joy. Yet he has no root (depth) in himself and when put under pressure of tribulation or persecution on account of the Word, immediately he falls away. What can give us depth (Real knowledge of the Bible, spiritual readings, lives of the saints, reception of care and love)?

9. That which was sown among thorns is like that which is heard, received and starts growth. But it is choked out by the cares of the world and the delight in riches (materialism). It remains unfruitful (See John 15:1-11 on the parable of the vine). That which is unfruitful is cut off and burned). Thorny soil may be that which was not prepared well, or was the result of lazy preparation or evil intervention (for the intervention of evil, see the following, Matt 13:23-48).

How can we be protected from evil and from the materialistic attractions of the world and help others to be protected from it? Think of the promises before baptism and confirmation?

10. The good soil represents the person who hears the word and understands it and perseveres and bears fruit. This is the person who prepares his soil well and then takes care of the growth of the seed to maturity. This is like the man who built his house on the rock, not on the sand (Mt 7:21-27).

11. How important is the Word? At the Second Vatican Council, the importance of the Word with the Eucharist was noted. "For this reason, the Church has always venerated the Scriptures as she venerates the Lord's Body. She never ceases to present to the faithful the bread of life, taken from the one table of God's Word and Christ's Body (CCC 103, DV 21). See additional sheet.

12. Let's think about the various soils and how we might better prepare ourselves to receive the Gospel. Which soil are we?

a. The hard path. What is it that might harden a person's heart? This person "hears" without understanding, leaving the word vulnerable to be stolen away by the evil one. Could attitude be an important factor here?

b. The shallow soil where the plants with no depth of root die quickly when under pressure.

What might make a person unable to stand up to difficulties and persecution? This person "hears" and "receives it with joy". But when some difficulty or persecution comes because of the word, he falls away.

Do you think this person "understood" the implications of what he was hearing? Do you think he understood the importance of fertilizing the word with prayer, spiritual reading, the sacraments, devotional practices, service and care of others? What's really going on here?

c. The thorny soil. What might lead a person to be dominated by the "worldly anxieties" or the "seduction of riches"?

Could there be an unwillingness to be formed by and be obedient to God's word and the Church?

This person “hears” the word but the “worldly anxieties” and the “lure of riches” choke the word and it bears no fruit.

Do you think that this person “understands” or is it a problem of not valuing the word adequately, or following other “gods” also?

d. The good soil. What factors come together to make good soil?

What allows one to “understand” what one hears from God?

What helps a person to be able to bear fruit? What might be the fruit?

What might make the difference between being able to produce at 30:1, 60:1 and 100:1?

Jesus identifies that this person “hears the word” and “understands” and does something with this understanding.

What factors do you think help us, especially our youth, to be able to “hear” the word?

What factors might go into being able to “understand” once one hears?

What are the benefits of being “good soil”? How would you present this to your children?

13. In conclusion, I invite each of us here to examine ourselves, to evaluate the kind of soil we are and what steps we need to take to make sure we are that good soil and that we are bearing fruit.

14. What from this homily might guide you to become “the-better-version-of-yourself” that God is inviting you to be?