

15th Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)

GOSPEL

+ Matthew 13, 1-23

That same day Jesus left the house and went out beside Lake Galilee, where he sat down to teach. Such large crowds gathered around him that he had to sit in a boat, while the people stood on the shore. Then he taught them many things by using stories. He said:

A farmer went out to scatter seed in a field. While the farmer was scattering the seed, some of it fell along the road and was eaten by birds. Other seeds fell on thin, rocky ground and quickly started growing because the soil wasn't very deep. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched and dried up, because they did not have enough roots. Some other seeds fell where thornbushes grew up and choked the plants. But a few seeds did fall on good ground where the plants produced a hundred or sixty or thirty times as much as was scattered. If you have ears, pay attention!

Jesus' disciples came to him and asked, "Why do you use nothing but stories when you speak to the people?"

Jesus answered:

I have explained the secrets about the kingdom of heaven to you, but not to others. Everyone who has something will be given more. But people who don't have anything will lose even what little they have. I use stories when I speak to them because when they look, they cannot see, and when they listen, they cannot hear or understand. So God's promise came true, just as the prophet Isaiah had said,

*"These people will listen
and listen,
but never understand.
They will look and look,
but never see.
All of them have
stubborn minds!
Their ears are stopped up,
and their eyes are covered.
They cannot see or hear
or understand.
If they could,
they would turn to me,
and I would heal them."*

But God has blessed you, because your eyes can see and your ears can hear! Many prophets and good people were eager to see what you see and to hear what you hear. But I tell you that they did not see or hear.

Now listen to the meaning of the story about the farmer:

The seeds that fell along the road are the people who hear the message about the kingdom, but don't understand it. Then the evil one comes and snatches the message from their hearts. The seeds that fell on rocky ground are the people who gladly hear the message and accept it right away. But they don't have deep roots, and they don't last very long. As soon as life gets hard or the message gets them in trouble, they give up.

The seeds that fell among the thornbushes are also people who hear the message. But they start worrying about the needs of this life and are fooled by the desire to get rich. So the message gets choked out, and they never produce anything. The seeds that fell on good ground are the people who hear and understand the message. They produce as much as a hundred or sixty or thirty times what was planted.

Word of God

HOMILY

July 13, 2014

SOW

When Jesus finishes telling the parable of the sower, he makes this invitation: "Anyone who has ears should listen." He asks us to pay attention to the parable. But what are we supposed to reflect on? The sower? The seed? The different terrains?

Traditionally we Christians have focused almost exclusively on the terrains where the seed falls, in order to look at what is our attitude as we listen to the Gospel. However it is important to watch the sower and his way of sowing.

The first thing Jesus says in the story is: "A sower went out to sow." He does it with a surprising confidence. He sows abundantly. The seed falls and falls all over the place, including where it seems impossible for the seed to germinate. That's how the farmers of Galilee did it: they sowed even on the sides of the paths and in rocky places.

It's not hard for people to identify the sower. That's how Jesus sowed his message. They saw him go out every morning to announce the Good News of God. He sowed his Word among the simple people who welcomed it, and also among the Scribes and Pharisees who rejected it. He never got tired. His sowing won't be fruitless.

Overcome by a strong religious crisis, we can think that the Gospel has lost its original power and that Jesus' message no longer has power to attract the attention of men and women today. Certainly this is not the moment to "harvest" resounding successes, but it is the moment to learn to sow without getting discouraged, with more humility and truth.

It's not the Gospel that has lost its humanizing power, but ourselves who are announcing it with a weak and wavering faith. It's not Jesus that has lost his power to attract. We are the ones who have distorted him with our senselessness and contradictions.

Pope Francis says that, when a Christian doesn't live a strong adhesion to Jesus, "he quickly loses enthusiasm and stops being sure of what he is transmitting, he lacks power and

passion. And a person who isn't convinced, enthusiastic, sure, in love, doesn't convince anyone."

Evangelizing isn't propagating a doctrine, but making the humanizing and saving power of Jesus present in the midst of society and in people's hearts. And this can't be done just any old way. What's most decisive isn't the number of preachers, catechists, teachers of religion, but the evangelical quality that Christians radiate. What are we spreading? Indifference or convinced faith? Mediocrity or a passion for a more human life?

José Antonio Pagola

HOMILY

July 10, 2011

GOING OUT TO SOW

Just before the evangelist Matthew began to tell us the parable of the Sower, he mentions that Jesus left the house and sat by the lakeside: he wanted to relax for a good while and have a chance to chat with all sorts of people and tell them about the Good News.

According to Matthew, Jesus is the Good Sower: it is from him that we should all learn to spread the Gospel.

First of all, we have to get out of our home. That is what Jesus asks from all his disciples: "Go out into the whole world...", "Go and make disciples..." of all people. In order to preach the Gospel we have to get out of our own security and interests. Preaching the Gospel means that we "go out" and meet people; talk to men and women in the streets and walk out of the small safe environment of the Church.

This going out to others does not mean proselytising. It has nothing to do with conversion or imposition. It simply gives an opportunity to people to hear about Jesus and knowing about the Good News that could give them a chance to have a better life and help others as well.

We cannot go out to sow if we do not carry with us the seed. Before we even think of preaching the Gospel to others, we must own it within the Church – in our own communities and in our own lives. It is a big mistake if we consider ourselves the carriers of the Christian tradition with the only task of handing it over to others. A Church that does not live the Good News cannot pass it on to others. A community that does not follow in the steps of Jesus cannot invite anyone to follow Him.

Many of the spiritual energies that are contained in our communities often remain untapped because they are blocked by an atmosphere of pessimism and discouragement. We are simply left with a mere "survival" rather than looking ahead to a new life. We must wake up from the slumber of our faith.

The present crisis we are experiencing is leading us towards the death of one kind of Christianity; but it may also be the beginning of a new Faith that is closer to Jesus and in the steps of the Gospel. The Gospel has enough energy to create new kinds of Faith in Christ at different stages of history. Our present times are one such stage.

But we must learn to sow the seed with faith, with realism and truth. Preaching the Gospel is not passed on like mere inheritance. It is made possible, not like a mere reproduction of the past, but like a new response to the Gospel as we hear the new questions, the new problems, the new aspirations and hopes of our present times. This is not the time to entertain or distract people with any sort of stories. This is the time to sow in the hearts of people the very essence of the Gospel.

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