



ST JOSEPH SYRO MALABAR CATHOLIC MISSION SAN DIEGO

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REV FR SONEY SEBASTIAN SVD

Sunday Readings and Meditation

August 10 Sunday Second Sunday of Elijah-Cross-Moses

Bear fruit, hearing the Word of God Mt 13:1-9,18-23

Today we come to the third of the five discourses of Jesus found in Matthew's gospel. It consists entirely of the Parables of the Kingdom of Heaven, as Matthew calls it. Kingdom of Heaven is not a place and still less a place in the future life, but a network of people and communities who are committed to all that God is and stands for, as revealed to us through the life and teaching of Jesus. They are those who work that God's will be done on earth, which is the establishment of the Kingdom.

These parables then are images that Jesus gives to help us understand how we are to enter into and become part of that Kingdom, of that kingship of God to which we adhere with all our heart and soul.

Our passage begins with Jesus leaving the house. Wherever two or three are gathered in my name, there I am among them. (Matthew 18:20)

And wherever people are closely related with Jesus, not just physically, but intentionally, that is to be on the "inside" and it is also to be part of the Kingdom.

We are told that the crowds wanting to listen to Jesus were so great that he had to use a boat moored near the shore to speak to them. In the Gospel, the boat also often represents the Church or the Christian community from which Jesus continues to speak his message to the world.

The parable of the Sower is very straightforward. It speaks about a farmer sowing seed in his field, a typical Palestinian field of the time. It is obviously a very mixed patch of ground. There are paths going across it where people have long established a right of way. There are bits of rock sticking up above the ground with small hollows where water can gather after rain. At that time, ploughing was done after the seed was sown, so there are weeds and brambles growing wild all over the place. And then there are parts of the field which have good, fertile soil.

Later part of the Gospel reading gives the explanation of the parable of the Sower. Perhaps we should say it is an interpretation rather than an explanation. The parable focuses on the Sower and the ultimate and inevitable success of his work. The interpretation, however, looks much more at the soil in which the seed falls. The interpretation reflects the experiences of the early Church as it tried to spread the Gospel. The four different kinds of soil are taken to represent four kinds of responses to the Word of God which it has received.

The first kind is like the seed on the stony path. The Word of God never even gets started but gets plucked away by the evil influences by which the person is surrounded. In our strongly secular world today it is not easy for the Word to take root with so many competing enticements.

The second kind is like the seed that falls on the rock. The Word of God is received with great enthusiasm; the person becomes a devout and active Christian. But, if obstacles arise which make the living of the Christian life difficult, the person falls away, maybe quickly, maybe gradually. As the Gospel says, the person has no roots; the faith has not gone deep, it is having not been really assimilated. This must have been



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the case with many in the early Church who enthusiastically embraced Christianity, but when persecution came, abandoned their faith. In our own time, we see this often enough when people, for instance, are removed from a protected environment where it is easy to live the faith to one where the faith is ignored or even ridiculed.

The third kind is like the seed that falls among the thorns and brambles. I would suggest that a very large number of us are touched by this category. Anxieties about many things and the lure of material goods can gradually choke off our commitment to the Gospel in its fullness. Our witness becomes seriously compromised and “there is no yield”, that is, we make no real contribution to building the Kingdom and changing the world. We sit on the fence and try to have the best of both worlds; we try to serve God and mammon, which Jesus says is not possible. I am sure many of us have matter for reflection here.

Finally, there is the fourth kind of seed which falls on good soil. This is the one “who hears the message and takes it in”. These hear the Word, accept the Word, make it their own and it overflows into all they are and do and speak. Much fruit for the world comes from such persons.

This image largely describes too the field in which Jesus the preacher and teacher is working. It provides very mixed soil and much of the seed does not go very far in producing fruit. All this has been described in what we have already seen of Jesus’ mission among the people, the religious leaders, his own family – and his disciples. It is these latter who are the fertile soil, these are the ones who will enter, who are already entering the Kingdom.

A parable in the Gospel usually makes just one point. In this case the message is that God’s plan will succeed, even though there seem to be setbacks. It was an important message for the early Christians to hear as it is for us today. It is a word of encouragement when Christians see how little success they seem to have at times in their evangelizing work. The message is not to worry – God’s Word will prevail; it will always find fertile soil in which to grow and multiply. Indeed, in the past, some communities did fail, but overall, the Christian communities grew, and the message spread to every corner of the world.

And then there is the final exhortation: Listen, anyone who has ears!

Listening and hearing are not the same. To hear is to be physically capable of picking up sound. To listen presumes attention and awareness; it implies understanding and acceptance and, ultimately, implementation of what is heard.

Am I ready to enter the Kingdom? What kind of soil do I present for the Lord’s Word? Am I really listening to him in the fullest sense?

These four types can still be found, and it is for each one of us to determine to which group we belong.

First Reading: Deut 7:7-11 Second Reading: Isa 30:18-26 Third Reading: 2 Thess 2:14-3:3