

Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Sunday Mass Readings & Spiritual Leadership Guide

July 12, 2026 · Lectionary 103

Sunday Mass Readings

FIRST READING

Isaiah 55:10–11

Thus says the LORD: Just as from the heavens the rain and snow come down and do not return there till they have watered the earth, making it fertile and fruitful, giving seed to the one who sows and bread to the one who eats, so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; my word shall not return to me void, but shall do my will, achieving the end for which I sent it.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM

Psalm 65:10, 11, 12–13, 14

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

You have visited the land and watered it; greatly have you enriched it. God's watercourses are filled; you have prepared the grain.

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

Thus have you prepared the land: drenching its furrows, breaking up its clods, softening it with showers, blessing its yield.

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

You have crowned the year with your bounty, and your paths overflow with a rich harvest; the untilled meadows overflow with it, and rejoicing clothes the hills.

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

The fields are garmented with flocks and the valleys blanketed with grain. They shout and sing for joy.

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

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SECOND READING

Romans 8:18–23

Brothers and sisters: I consider that the sufferings of this present time are as nothing compared with the glory to be revealed for us. For creation awaits with eager expectation the revelation of the children of God; for creation was made subject to futility, not of its own accord but because of the one who subjected it, in hope that creation itself would be set free from slavery to corruption and share in the glorious freedom of the children of God.

We know that all creation is groaning in labor pains even until now; and not only that, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, we also groan within ourselves as we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.

GOSPEL

Matthew 13:1–23

On that day, Jesus went out of the house and sat down by the sea. Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat down, and the whole crowd stood along the shore. And he spoke to them at length in parables, saying: “A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and birds came and ate it up. Some 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. But some seed fell on rich soil, and produced fruit, a hundred or sixty or thirtyfold. Whoever has ears ought to hear.”

The disciples approached him and said, “Why do you speak to them in parables?” He said to them in reply, “Because knowledge of the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven has been granted to you, but to them it has not been granted. To anyone who has, more will be given and he will grow rich; from anyone who has not, even what he has will be taken away. This is why I speak to them in parables, because they look but do not see and hear but do not listen or understand.”

Isaiah’s prophecy is fulfilled in them, which says: “You shall indeed hear but not understand, you shall indeed look but never see. Gross is the heart of this people, they will hardly hear with their ears, they have closed their eyes, lest they see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their hearts and be converted, and I heal them.”

“But blessed are your eyes, because they see, and your ears, because they hear. Amen, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.”

“Hear then the parable of the sower. The seed sown on the path is the one who hears the word of the kingdom without understanding it, and the evil one comes and steals away what was sown in his heart. The seed sown on rocky ground is the one who hears the word and receives it at once with joy. But he has no root and lasts only for a time. When some tribulation or persecution comes because of the word, he immediately falls away. The seed sown among thorns is the one who hears the word, but then worldly anxiety and the lure of riches choke the word and it bears no fruit. But the seed sown on rich soil is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields a hundred or sixty or thirtyfold.”

All readings sourced from USCCB, Lectionary 103

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Reflection

The readings for this Sunday are filled with images of seed, soil, rain, and harvest. Isaiah promises that God's word is never wasted: like rain and snow, it descends with purpose, watering what is dry and bringing forth fruit in due season. The psalm rejoices in a land softened, drenched, and crowned with bounty. These images remind us that God often works in hidden ways before anything visible appears above the surface.

In the Gospel, Jesus tells us that the seed is good; the sower is generous; the real question is the soil. Leadership drawn from these readings begins not with producing more fruit by force, but with tending the ground. Paul adds a deeper dimension: creation itself groans in hope, waiting for redemption. The leader who understands this does not panic when growth is slow or when the field is still groaning. Faithful leadership prepares the soil, receives the word, protects it from being choked, and trusts God for the harvest.

Leadership Principles

PRINCIPLE 1

Trust That God's Word Is Never Wasted

Isaiah declares that God's word "shall not return to me void" (Is 55:11). We may not always see immediate results, but we must trust that truth spoken in faith has power beyond what is visible. Leading our families and others to Christ requires patience with hidden growth.

PRINCIPLE 2

Tend the Soil Before Demanding the Harvest

In the parable, the seed is the same, but the soil differs (Mt 13:3–9). Wise leaders pay attention to conditions: clarity, trust, attention, readiness, and depth. Before asking people to bear fruit, we must ask what needs to be softened, cleared, or cultivated.

PRINCIPLE 3

Protect the Word from Being Choked

Jesus names worldly anxiety and the lure of riches as thorns that choke the word (Mt 13:22). Leading our families, parish, and community means we must identify what crowds out our mission: distraction, fear, status, urgency, or comfort. Fruitfulness often requires pruning what looks productive but is actually choking growth.

PRINCIPLE 4

Lead with Hope in the Groaning

Paul says creation is groaning in labor pains, not death throes (Rom 8:22). Spiritual leaders learn to distinguish pain that signals despair from pain that signals birth. Hopeful leadership does not deny suffering; it interprets it through the promise of redemption.

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PRINCIPLE 5

Measure Fruitfulness by Depth, Not Speed

Seed on rocky ground springs up quickly but withers because it has no root (Mt 13:5–6, 20–21). When we chase instant enthusiasm, we may mistake speed for transformation. Lasting fruit comes from depth: rootedness, perseverance, understanding, and endurance.

Discussion Questions

QUESTION 1

Isaiah says God’s word will not return void (Is 55:11). Where have you been tempted to believe that your faithful words, prayers, or acts are not making a difference? What would change if you trusted that God is still working beneath the surface?

QUESTION 2

Jesus describes several kinds of soil. Which soil best describes the current condition of your heart or leadership: hardened path, rocky ground, thorny soil, or rich soil? What is one concrete thing that would help your soil become more receptive?

QUESTION 3

The thorns are “worldly anxiety and the lure of riches” (Mt 13:22). What anxieties, ambitions, or distractions most often choke the word in how you lead your family? What might need to be pruned this week?

QUESTION 4

Paul says creation is groaning as it waits for redemption (Rom 8:22–23). Where do you see groaning in your family, parish, or community? How might you lead in that place with hope rather than frustration or avoidance?

QUESTION 5

The rich soil bears fruit “a hundred or sixty or thirtyfold” (Mt 13:23). What kind of fruit do you most long to see in how you lead others right now? What slow, hidden work might God be asking you to participate in before that fruit appears?

Closing Action

A concrete, personal response drawn from the readings this week:

This week, choose one area of leadership where the soil has become hard, shallow, or crowded with thorns. Do one act of cultivation: remove one distraction, create one quiet space for listening, ask one clarifying question, or speak one word of encouragement that helps the seed take root. Do not force the harvest. Prepare the soil and trust the Sower (Mt 13:23).

***“The seed sown on rich soil is the one who hears the word and understands it.” —
Matthew 13:23***

Closing Prayer

Lord God, your word never returns to you empty. Send it again into the dry and hidden places of our lives. Water what has grown hard. Soften what has become resistant. Break up the clods of fear, distraction, and pride so that your word may take root in us.

Jesus, faithful Sower, teach us to lead with patience. Keep us from demanding fruit before the soil has been tended. Free us from the thorns of anxiety and the lure of lesser treasures. Give us ears that hear, eyes that see, and hearts that understand.

Holy Spirit, firstfruits of redemption, sustain us when creation groans and when growth is slow. Make us rich soil for the Kingdom, that your word may bear fruit in us—a hundred, sixty, or thirtyfold—for the glory of the Father. Amen.

“The seed that falls on good ground will yield a fruitful harvest.” — Psalm 65