

HOMILY 15th SUN OT YRA 2017

My first assignment when I was first ordained was at Our Lady of Good Council. They had a big Life Teen program at the time with a Sunday evening Life Teen Mass. They had a large group of teens that would attend the mass and they sat up in front as a group. I had never worked with teens before, so I wanted to work on my homilies for that Mass so I could speak to the teens. I did not think I was having much success after the first couple of Masses, so I started going to the meeting that had each week with the teen leaders to get input from them on my homilies. That did not help much. When I gave my homilies, most of the time the teens were looking at me like when is he going to shut up and sit down. So I went to one of the teen leaders and asked how I was doing. She said: “Oh Fr. Jim. When our beautiful children become teen, aliens come and take them away and you do not even recognize them. But don’t worry. The aliens will bring them back when they get a little older. You are doing great. You are just not going to get feedback from them.” So I did not give up. That night after Mass I went to the Youth Group meeting. I overheard a group of teens talking about my homily. They were listening; they just were not giving me feedback.

In the Gospel reading we hear the parable of the sower of the seed. They were just sowing seed everywhere. The seed that fell on the path, on rocky ground and among weeds does not grow. Only the seed that fell on rich soil grew. To be perfectly honest with you, the sewer of the seed in the parable does not seem to know what they are doing. It is pretty obvious where the rich soil is. I am no farmer, but I don’t think I would sew seed among rocks or thorns. But Jesus is not really talking about farming, is he? Jesus is talking about evangelization. The difference between farming and evangelization is that with evangelization you cannot always tell the rich soil from the rocky or thorny soil. When I first started preaching to the teens I thought I am just wasting my time. I should just give up. It would have been a missed opportunity.

So let's talk a little about evangelization. The only way that our faith will grow among others is if we sow the seed. Our faith grows only when people who have faith sow it with others. All of you have seed to sow. You are all here today, pray and try to live Christian lives for a reason, not just because you have nothing else to do on the weekends. You all have faith and are disciples of Jesus Christ. You have to share what you have. It is easy to share our faith on rich soil, when people come to you and ask you about your faith or about St. Edith, and that is important. But we have to sow seed all over because we really do not know when that seemingly rocky or thorny soil is rich. We need to be radically welcoming, accepting and loving to everyone who comes here, even to people who do not look receptive, to people you do not know. You really cannot judge what effect you will have on them. We need to focus upon getting people to come to church, but we also have to focus upon making our church a place where people want to come. I want visitors to St. Edith to think that there is something really good going on here. I want to be part of it. And everyone plays a role.

And we need to scatter seed all over outside of church. And we cannot be preoccupied or frustrated by the seed that does not grow. It is all good seed. And sometimes the seed is growing; we just do not see it. And sometimes the seed falls among rocks and it just sits there until the rocky soil becomes rich. When I am out and about during the day I wear my clerics. When I strike up a conversation with people they frequently ask what church I am from. I say: "St. Edith" and then I give them our Mass times and invite them to come. I also tell them to stop and talk to me when they come. The first couple of times I said that I thought: "They are just asking about my church to make conversation, they are not going to come, rocky soil." Until they started to come. "I am the cashier at Joe's Produce that you invited to come. I am the waiter at J Alexander that served you last week." The first time that happened it blew me away, so I keep doing it. You will have similar opportunities as well. All of you have good seed to sow. Scatter it all over.