

HOMILY 15th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

JULY 12, 2020

In the Gospel reading, we hear the parable of the sowing of the seed. Jesus' point in this parable is not to give us instructions on how to farm. If we were farming, we would never waste good seed by sowing it on the path, or rocky ground or among thorns. We would sow all of our good seed on rich soil. A parable is a simple story used to illustrate a moral or spiritual lesson. The parable illustrates the different ways that people receive the Word of God. You cannot tell by looking at someone how receptive they are to receiving the Word of God, so when we evangelize we should never give up on anyone. We should spread the word to everyone. Let's talk about the different types of soil and how receptive people may be to the Word of God. I think we also have to see how receptive we are as individuals. My guess here is that everyone has all four types of soil within themselves.

Did you know that the Psychic Services Industry is a \$2 billion industry in the United States? This includes psychic readings, palm reading, tarot cards, reading tea leaves, etc. Do you know who the biggest consumers are of Psychic Services? Atheists and agnostics. This tells me that everyone is looking for something to believe in, something spiritual, even atheists and agnostics. The conversations I have had with atheists and agnostics indicate that it is more of a rejection of organized religion, but they are still searching spiritually. So we cannot give up on them. Atheists and agnostics we would normally think of as the seed that falls on the path, people that are totally non-receptive. I think we all have part of the path in us, and sometimes we should examine our lives to see if it is time to be more open. Maybe it is: "I know we are called to

forgive, but I will never forgive my sister.” “Or, I know it is wrong to cheat on my taxes or steal supplies from work, but if I can get away with it I am going to rationalize it and do it.” Maybe it is time to take a second look.

Some of the seed falls on rocky ground. These are people who have a particular religious or spiritual experience. They are very enthusiastic, but the enthusiasm does not last very long. This sometimes happens after a good retreat, or visiting a shrine, or visiting Lourdes, or after a God experience. We have a great experience and when we get back to our normal routine, we fall back into bad habits of the past. I think we have all experienced this at one time or another. Experts tell us that 43% of our behavior is governed by habit that we never think about. If we are going to change our habits, we need to be very purposeful about it. Think about it. Maybe you need to renew an old enthusiasm.

Some of the seed falls among thorns. You hear the work of God, you accept it, but you do not change your behavior. I think of these areas of our lives as the areas where we procrastinate. “I will start praying every day after I retire.” “I want to volunteer at church but I will have to wait until I am not so busy.” “I will forgive my sister but I am going to wait until she apologizes to me.” “I want to face an addiction, but I am not quite ready yet.” Maybe today is a time to stop procrastinating.

There is also the rich soil. We all have areas of our lives where we have heard the Word of God and we have allowed it to shape our behavior. We all need to strive to change the paths, the rocky soil and the thorny areas of our lives into soil. This requires that we examine our lives to identify the paths, the rocky ground and the thorns.

In the Gospel reading today, the disciples ask Jesus why he speaks to people in parables. Jesus does this all of the time. Trying to explain our faith in theoretical, abstract, or academic terms is the best way to share our faith. Discussions of doctrine and dogma can be important, but Jesus' use of parables emphasizes the importance of storytelling. We need to share the stories of our lives with one another. The stories are what connect the doctrine and dogma to real life. Don't try to explain things to me. Tell me a story. So, change your paths, rocky soil and thorns into rich soil, and if you want to help me to do that, tell me a story.