

## Homily for July 12<sup>th</sup>, 2020 – 15<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

The Parable of the Sower of the Seeds is one of the classic parables. Parables seemed to be Jesus' preferred way of teaching. All parables, including today's, have these four things in common: **1)** They always bring out a truth, not a scientific or historical, more a mythical truth. Think of when you were a child and your parents read you a fairy tale. They were not true as far as talking foxes go or trolls living under bridges go, but they embodied a truth, a life lesson. These were mythical truths. What is a myth? Something that is truer than true. **2)** Parables are always puzzling; they are never obvious. You have to puzzle them in your head for a while before you draw out their meaning. **3)** With parables you always learn something about yourself and/or about God. **4)** Parables always have surprise endings. The surprise ending, the kicker, in today's parable is the yield of 100, 60, and 30-fold of grain. That never happens in our world, but in the world Jesus is introducing us to—the Kingdom of God—surprises are the order of the day.

Before Jesus tells us the parable, he does something interesting. The opening line of today's gospel passage says: ***Jesus went out of the house*** (in Biblical language "house" is code language for "church". Remember the first churches were house-churches). Jesus goes to where the people are. He does not wait for people to come to the house, the church. The next line says: ***Such great crowds gathered around him***. Where were the people? Outside the house. That is why Jesus went outside the house. Then it says: ***He sat by the sea***. The sea is the place where you catch fish. If you want to catch fish, you have to go where the fish are. Every fisherman knows this. You cannot catch fish by sitting in the house and watching a show on T.V. about fishing. Similarly, the Irish have an expression: You will never plough a field by turning it over in your head.



Now we get into the parable. The sower of seeds, in the parable, does the same thing Jesus does in real life. He goes to all sorts of grounds spreading seeds. The sower of seeds, like Jesus, is moving out engaging the world. The sower gambles by casting seeds everywhere

even to places that have little hope of success. Jesus gambles by leaving the house, the church, and speaking to the non-churched about God and God's ways. Neither the sower nor Jesus have any guarantees that their efforts will bear any fruit whatsoever, but they do it anyways, and they do it with reckless abandon. Similarly, you parents raised children without any guarantees of how they would turn out, but you did it anyways, and you did it with reckless abandon.

Traditionally, this story was almost always interpreted as you and I being the soil and that we needed to prepare the soil of our hearts in the best possible way in order to receive the Word of God, the seed, in the hopes that that seed would bear good fruit in our lives. The emphasis was on **us** becoming good soil. While I think that's all true, there seems to be another, more important emphasis besides us. The real emphasis in this parable is on God, the sower. Why else would Jesus' opening line to the story be, "**Listen! A sower went out to sow.**"? This is a story that reveals more about God, the sower, than about the seed or the ground.

In this parable there are 3 states of loss and 3 states of gain. There is an **immediate loss** (the birds come immediately and eat the seeds). There is a **gradual loss** (the plants sprout but without roots they wither and die). And there is an **ultimate loss** (weeds choke them to death). You have all experienced losses in your life: some were immediate, some were gradual, and some were ultimate/permanent. The losses in this parable are analysed; we are told why the seeds did not grow, why they did not mature, and why they did not bear fruit. The losses are analyzed. However, the gains of 30, 60, 100-fold are not analyzed. I suppose it is easier to analyze what went wrong in our lives, even to assign blame, than it is to say what went right.

Remember, though, this is a story about a sower who sows with reckless abandon and who spends no time analyzing anything. This sower spends no time analyzing whether rocky soil is worth his effort, nor does he spend any time blaming the birds or the thorns. There is simply no time for that. There is an urgency to get on with sowing God's word. So, if a church has not been built yet, and there is no ambo to proclaim the Word from, you just do something else. You sit on a boat by the sea and make do as Jesus did. The urgency of sharing God's Word moves you to act now.

The Sower sows in your life with reckless abandon and with urgency. That is what God is like. God does not wait for the perfect soil nor for the perfect conditions in your life, your marriage, your job, or your church before coming to you with life-giving words.

That brings us to another thing we learn about God. Besides sowing with reckless abandon and with urgency, God sows with persistence and confidence. In other words, God keeps sowing love, patience, forgiveness, justice, and mercy against all odds and never stops sowing. Why? Because, as we heard in the first reading, ***God's word is like the rain that comes down from heaven. It will not return there until it brings forth the sprout giving seed to the sower and bread to the one who eats.*** This Word shall not return to the heavens until it has accomplished its purpose. Its purpose is to bring forth love forgiveness, mercy, justice, etc.

Similarly, in your life, keep sowing the seed, even when you want to give up because the odds are stacked against you. God's word will not return to the heavens until it bears good fruit in your life. When we open to God, the sower who sows with reckless abandon and urgency, with persistence and confidence, what will happen? We will experience another dimension of God—God's abundance. Notice the bountiful crops of 30, 60, and 100-fold that Jesus talks about. I am no farmer, but I have been told that a good crop would yield a harvest of 4-5 times, not 30, 60 and definitely not 100 times. Now I am beginning to understand why God is so wasteful in spreading the seed. God does not care that much of the seed goes wasted. Why? Because what does take hold more than makes up for what was lost.

Jesus is a risk-taker because God is a risk-taker. Jesus risks leaving the church to meet people by the shore because it is urgent that people know about God's love for them. The sower of seeds in the parable is a risk-taker scattering seeds where there is little hope of germination. And what is the result of the risk? Abundance, extravagance, an over-the-top result. Think of the parable of the lost coin. When the woman sweeps the house and finds a single lost coin, she throws an extravagant party for her neighbours. Think of the parable of the lost sheep. When the shepherd finds the one lost sheep, he throws an extravagant party for his friends. Think of the story of the lost son. When the father finds his prodigal son, he throws an extravagant party. Or, think of the story of the multiplication of the fish and loaves. What extravagance that there would be more leftovers than there was fish and loaves to begin with!

The problem with God is that God never makes enough. God always makes too much. God takes your little joy and makes it into too much joy. And when you know this truth, then you know as St. Paul knew, that the sufferings of this present time are nothing compared to the glory and the abundance that awaits you.

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