

The Parable of the Sower and the Seed is the first in a series of seven parables that St. Matthew has in the 13th Chapter of his Gospel. In the coming Sundays, we will be listening to the remaining six parables on the kingdom of God. In turning to today's Gospel, Jesus tells us the parable of the Sower and the Seed and how the Word of God becomes planted in people's hearts.

Jesus tells the crowd, "Look, a farmer went out to sow his seed." The crowd can then immediately picture in their minds a Palestinian farmer putting his hand into the bag of seed which hangs around his neck, taking a fistful of grain and scattering it over his field. After telling the story, the Apostles are a little confused so they say to Jesus, "What is the message of this parable?"

Jesus responds to their question by telling them that He is the sower of the seed in the parable. The Words He is speaking are the seeds. The hearts of those who are listening to Jesus are the soil that the seed falls upon. Jesus describes four possible responses to the Word of God.

The first response about the soil in a person's heart is the path that people walk on. This is the person who hears the Word of God but does not understand it. So, because the one who hears the Word of God does not understand it, or does not try to understand it, the devil comes and snatches it away.

The second response about the soil in a person's heart is the rocky ground. This is the person who welcomes the Word of God with joy. But since there is no root and no depth, any trial or persecution the person goes through causes the person to fall away. Hence, the Word cannot take hold or take root. The Word of God, therefore, dies before it can become part of the person's life.

The third response about the soil in a person's heart is about the thorns. This person hears the Word of God, but the worries of this world and the desire for material riches choke the Word so that it produces nothing.

The fourth response about the soil in a person's heart is the most important because it is about it being good, rich soil. This person hears the Word and brings forth a bountiful crop, some a hundredfold, some sixtyfold, and some

thirtyfold. This person hears the Word of God, understands it, bears fruit abundantly, and yields a rich harvest by the manner in which they live their life in the imitation of Christ's life.

We could use an analogy and apply the truth of this parable to the Sunday homily which a priest often spends many hours preparing. Different people hear the homily differently. Some people's hearts are like the pavement. For them, the homily is the time to tune out or let the words just go in one ear and out the other. They never apply it to themselves.

There may be some people's hearts that are like rocks where the seeds of the homily have no roots because people are waiting for passion, fireworks, or great emotional hype, but then afterwards they just go back to business as usual.

Other people's hearts are like thorns. They can be people who have a running debate with the homilist. "He is too harsh, too fuzzy, too conservative, too liberal, too academic, too devotional, too long, too short."

So we ask ourselves what kind of soil are we? Are we the pavement, where God's Word stays on the surface and anything can distract us from the homily? Or are we the rock that never lets God's Word sink in very deeply? Do we reduce our faith to feelings and nice thoughts but never let it shape our life in any serious way?

Let us take some time to think about these things during the coming week. Are we filled with thorns, interests, addictions, distractions, or other priorities that choke off the Word of God in our lives? The question is not whether we *hear* the Word of God in our life. *We do hear it* because it comes to us through Scripture and through the Liturgy. But, how much do we *respond* to it? How much do we *embrace* it? How much do we let it *take root and grow in our lives*?

If a very important person were to celebrate the Mass and give the homily, everyone would be listening very carefully. However, at each Sunday Mass, *Jesus Himself* is speaking to us in the Gospels, in the homily, in our celebration of the Mass. The Word of God comes to us as our spiritual friend. The Word of God is a sign of God's love for us. Through His Word God calls us to a fuller and

more fruitful life. Its purpose is to *enrich* us, and a great enrichment does result when a person hears the Word *and acts on it*.

So the lesson in today's parable is all about *decision making and listening to God's voice*. Our hearts are the soil upon which the seeds of God's Word are falling today. As the Word of God is sown in our hearts, we must *decide* if our faith is shallow or if our heart is the good, fertile soil we have open to the planting of God's Word. Do we allow God's Word to take root in our hearts as we listen to His Word each week? The choice is up to each one of us who is listening to the Gospel to freely choose to receive God's Word into our heart.

In today's parable, Jesus challenges us, "if you have ears, hear this!" Jesus is not referring to our physical ears, but to the power of the heart to listen and heed the Word of God. Reaping the rich harvest of God's goodness depends on our openness to making a decision to listen and receive His Word in our heart.

To be active listeners of God's Word, the sincere disciple of Jesus is encouraged to develop a life of prayer. We can also begin by listening more actively and by responding to God's Word in each Sunday's Gospel reading, and in the words we hear and say here at Mass.

Time spent in peaceful and quiet reflection opens the heart to God's message. It becomes the *good soil* Jesus speaks of in today's Gospel but only when it is ready to receive the *seeds* of God's Word. If we allow God's Word to be nourished in the soil of our hearts and put God's Word into action, it will yield a rich harvest of eternal life. As we have heard in today's Parable of the Sower and the Seed, God's Word is especially sown in the hearts of each one of us to be received and to be nourished.