

The Paper Pulpit

(Reflections from the Pastor)

15th Sunday in Ordinary Time

As I write this reflection I reflect back on the day of my ordination to the priesthood 18 years ago today (July 13). My first assignment was teaching at Regis High School in Eau Claire and assisting on the weekends at Sacred Heart and St. Patrick's Parishes. After completing three years of teaching, Bishop Burke assigned me Pastor at St. Ansgar's in Blair and St. John's in Whitehall. I was there just one year when Bishop Burke assigned me Pastor at St. Bron's where I served for thirteen years (twelve years is now the norm in the diocese). I now serve as Pastor at St. Max's since July 1 of last year. I have loved and love being a priest and look forward to serving you for the next eleven years. Please know that you are in my prayers everyday and please keep me in yours.

Today, our Lord uses seeds to talk about our faith. Living in a farming community I'm sure you can relate. As with every analogy, they can fall short. Here, the Lord asks if we are seeds planted in the earth, "where are you planted?"

Today's gospel is about farming in its simplest form, not the mega machinery that is used in today's farm fields. I don't know the first thing about farming, so I'll stay focused on the spiritual aspects of the parable. Jesus focuses on the seed and where the seed is planted. The seed is representative of the Word of God. But what are the qualities of a seed and what do these qualities have to tell us about the Word of God? We know from the parable of the mustard seed that seeds are disproportionately small compared with what they eventually produce. And what does that say about the Word of God that the Sower sows? It says that the true coming of the Word of God, even if you see it, doesn't look like very much and that when it does finally get around to doing its real work, it is so mysterious that it can't even be found at all. That is the second thing about seeds, they disappear. They do so because of their need to be covered over with earth in order to grow... they simply die and disappear."

Then our Lord focuses his parable on the soil. In Palestine, the fields were sown in long, narrow strips and the ground between the strips was a right of way. It was used as a common path and therefore was beaten as hard as pavement by the constant foot traffic it received. This is what our Lord meant by the seed 'falling by the wayside'. Secondly, the stony ground was not ground which was filled with stones, but rather a thin skin of earth on top of an underlying shelf of limestone rock, which was very common in Palestine. The earth might be only a few inches deep before the rock was reached. On such ground the seed would certainly germinate; and it would germinate quickly, because the ground grew speedily warm with the heat of the sun. But there was no depth of earth and when it sent down its roots in search of nourishment and moisture, it would meet only the rock, and would be starved to death, and quite unable to withstand the heat of the day. The third option, the thorny ground, could well have been ground in which there were many weeds, and we will look at this more in depth next week. The final ground is the good, fertile ground in which the seed not only germinates but grows strong and bears fruit.

So in a nutshell, the seed that fell on the path is the person who does not even listen to God's Word. In today's world, this person does not practice any faith: they are not interested in knowing anything about the Bible, Jesus or His Church. The seed that fell among the ground with a lot of stones is a person who hears the Word of God but doesn't really allow the Word of God to go deep inside, to really affect their life. This would be a person who says they are Christian but really don't practice. They say they know Jesus, but really don't. The third seed falls in with the weeds. This person wants to practice their faith, but hangs around folks who smother it. This can happen especially in teenage years. Finally the seed that falls on good ground is truly faithful (not perfect) but faithful and worthy of bearing fruit and eternal life.

Which seed are you? If you don't like the soil you are in, would you like to be transplanted? Not sure how? Give me a call.

Bible Study and just a good ole discussion of the faith and topics that affect us as Catholics in society: I will be hosting a study of the bible (but a whole lot more than a bible study) beginning this Tuesday through the first three Tuesdays in August. The format will begin with Mass at 6:00 followed by supper (brats and burgers or you can bring along anything that can be grilled) at 6:30. Then we'll have a discussion on a variety of topics around the fire pit at the rectory. All ages are invited. Refreshments will be provided. There will also be activities for the kids. Since I'll need to know how much food to have, there will be a sign-up sheet in the gathering space. Come to one or come to them all. See me for more details.

Sincerely in Christ, Fr. Jim Trempe