

Dcn. Jerry's Homily for July 16, 2023, 15th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Today's parable gives different examples of how we receive the Word of God. Jesus shows how different types of soil receive and provide an environment for seeds to germinate and grow.

This parable is just as relevant today. We have free will and that means we have the ability to change. We can cultivate a seedbed for the Word to grow in our heart.

If we look at the examples of types of "bad soil" in this parable we see how they relate to our faults. Can we fix those faults?

Our hearts have all been bruised and battered. We may have been hurt by someone. We put up a defense to try to avoid future hurt. The hardened heart is a shield. But the greater the shield against hurt, the less capable the heart is to accept love or to love. The heart becomes cold and unfeeling. The less the ability of the heart to be warmed by love the more it goes into a spiritual hibernation. The Word of God can wake it, warm the seed bed to accept God's message and his love. When we are at our lowest, such as Saul on the road to Damascus or individuals with an addiction, we flail about looking for a better life. But unless we admit our need for the seed of God's love then we fail. We need to be self-reflective. After all, a gardener would look and say the garden needs to be weeded or spaded to be a properly prepared seedbed. We need to do the same with the garden of our heart.

If we are open to that seed of the Good News then there is a small furrow, a small hole in our heart, in which God can plant and take root. If not, our heart will be dormant and infertile.

In today's parable there is a similarity between the seed that falls on the hardened path and that which falls on rock. There is no opportunity for the seed to take root. The third example, the rich soil in which the seed takes root and is choked off by the weeds that is us. It is a common problem for gardeners. We start off with good intentions as gardeners in the spring. We plan, we plant, we water and then we get distracted. The garden is in good shape and then we go on vacation or get busy, or it rains for a week straight. When we return to the garden it is full of weeds. We have two choices. We can stay distracted and let the garden get worse. We can spend a great deal of effort weeding and cleaning out the garden. Fertilize and water. If we take the former path perhaps, we can burn out the weeds in the fall or let the plot go fallow. It is essentially dormant and full of weed seeds ready to sprout if given a chance. If we take the latter path the garden will be productive, perhaps not as productive as if we had tended it all along. We can enjoy the fruits of the garden and resolve to do even better in the next season. In fact, both gardeners may plan to do better next year. The first gardener, the "oh well gardener" has to overcome a great deal of inertia to turn this aspiration into

reality. The second gardener is already living the reality of working to do the right thing to be productive.

Distraction is one of the biggest problems of our day. Video games, sports, being a workaholic, hunting, fishing, golf, politics. Smart phones that make you dumb. Pick your distraction or your distractions. Many of us suffer from more than one distraction, just as most gardens suffer from more than one type of weed.

The fourth place that seed lands is on rich soil, and it takes root and flourishes and provides a rich harvest. How many of you think you are rich soil? Well, if you do believe that you are rich soil, perhaps that lack of humility is a rock that reduces your capacity to provide the proper growing space for God's grace.

We have free will and can choose to be a different type of soil. Christ could have added that the reason the soil was rich is that for years the gardener had mulched and amended the soil and irrigated it so that every crop became better and better, and the soil increased in fertility. As Catholic Christians, we should ask ourselves how to make our hearts a more fertile resting place for God's Word so that we may bring his Word out into the world.

The parable of the Sower teaches us many lessons. First focus on God. Stop worrying about things we cannot change. They just distract us from receiving and growing in God's grace. Remember he provides the rains for the field and rains down grace for our hearts. Second look in the mirror, do I have a hardened heart or a shallow heart that makes it difficult for me to accept and give love. Find some small way to give. Find some small way to trust. Find some small way to trust. Each little victory in which we cultivate these virtues make our heart more supple to receive the seed of God's love. We will become a fertile field in which his grace will grow and grow. There is a limit to how many tomatoes you can grow in a garden. Love is limitless and there is no limit to the amount of love that the human heart can absorb or give.

Clean away those hardened scales. The untended garden is choked by weeds but the untended heart? Repent and pray. Approach the difficulties of life with joy rather than fear and your heart will grow and grow in grace. God will provide everything we need to have an abundant harvest if we are just open to him.

~Dcn. Jerry