

Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time – July 16, 2017 – Good Shepherd Parish

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 55:10-11

Thus says the LORD: Just as from the heavens the rain and snow come down and do not return there till they have watered the earth, making it fertile and fruitful, giving seed to the one who sows and bread to the one who eats, so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; my word shall not return to me void, but shall do my will, achieving the end for which I sent it.

Psalm: Ps 65:10, 11, 12-13, 14

R. (Luke 8:8) The seed that falls on good ground will yield a fruitful harvest.

You have visited the land and watered it;
greatly have you enriched it.
God's watercourses are filled;
you have prepared the grain.

R. The seed that falls on good ground will yield a fruitful harvest.

Thus have you prepared the land: drenching its furrows,
breaking up its clods,
softening it with showers,
blessing its yield.

R. The seed that falls on good ground will yield a fruitful harvest.

You have crowned the year with your bounty,
and your paths overflow with a rich harvest;
the untilled meadows overflow with it,
and rejoicing clothes the hills.

R. The seed that falls on good ground will yield a fruitful harvest.

The fields are garmented with flocks
and the valleys blanketed with grain.
They shout and sing for joy.

R. The seed that falls on good ground will yield a fruitful harvest.

Scripture Reading: Romans 8:18-23

Brothers and sisters: I consider that the sufferings of this present time are as nothing compared with the glory to be revealed for us. For creation awaits with eager expectation the revelation of the children of God; for creation was made subject to futility, not of its own accord but because of the one who subjected it, in hope that creation itself would be set free from slavery to corruption and share in the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that all creation is groaning in labor pains even until now; and not only that, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, we also groan within ourselves as we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.

Gospel: Matthew 13:1-23

On that day, Jesus went out of the house and sat down by the sea. Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat down, and the whole crowd stood along the shore. And he spoke to them at length in parables, saying: "A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky ground, where it had little soil. It sprang up at once because the soil was not deep, and when the sun rose it was scorched, and it withered for lack of roots. Some seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it. But some seed fell on rich soil, and produced fruit, a hundred or sixty or thirtyfold. Whoever has ears ought to hear."

The disciples approached him and said, "Why do you speak to them in parables?" He said to them in reply, "Because knowledge of the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven has been granted to you, but to them it has not been granted. To anyone who has, more will be given and he will grow rich; from anyone who has not, even what he has will be taken away. This is why I speak to them in parables, because they look but do not see and hear but do not listen or understand. Isaiah's prophecy is fulfilled in them, which says: *You shall indeed hear but not understand, you shall indeed look but never see. Gross is the heart of this people, they will hardly hear with their ears, they have closed their eyes, lest they see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their hearts and be converted, and I heal them.* "But blessed are your eyes, because they see, and your ears, because they hear. Amen, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.

"Hear then the parable of the sower. The seed sown on the path is the one who hears the word of the kingdom without understanding it, and the evil one comes and steals away what was sown in his heart. The seed sown on rocky ground is the one who hears the word and receives it at once with joy. But he has no root and lasts only for a time. When some tribulation or persecution comes because of the word, he immediately falls away. The seed sown among thorns is the one who hears the word, but then worldly anxiety and the lure of riches choke the word and it bears no fruit. But the seed sown on rich soil is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields a hundred or sixty or thirtyfold."

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INVITATION TO PRAY

Pause for a few moments of silence and enter more deeply into the presence of God.

Proclaim the Scriptures out loud.

As you listen to the scriptures be attentive to a word, a phrase, a question, an image, or a feeling that emerges. Reflect on this quietly or share it aloud.

INVITATION TO REFLECT

The readings for this nearly mid-summer Sunday reflect the beauties of the earth, its golden harvests, its astonishing Spring, its delicate birds, beasts, mountains, hills and plains. There are infinite surprises for us, if our eyes can see. I want to quote a complete poem in this space, hoping that I am not just indulging my attachment to poetry. The Jesuit poet Hopkins was so filled with the world's beauty that I want him to speak here, in the poem called "Pied Beauty."

*Glory be to God for dappled things for skies of couple-color as a brinded cow;
For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim; fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches' wings;
Landscape plotted and pieced—fold, fallow, and plough; and all trades, their gear and tackle and trim.
All things counter, original, spare, strange; whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)
With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim; He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change: Praise him.*

Some of the language is unusual, I admit. But if you spend time with these glorious images you will come to love our ever-evolving blue planet like someone bathing in ocean swirl. All of it is luxuriant, all of it is precious. Can you feel it? In the First Reading the Lord uses this ebb and flow of seasons to show how his visceral love for the earth does its job. **Must I pretend to be rich soil, though I know my shallowness?** He says this: just as the rain and snow come to earth and return to the heavens when they have done their job of watering, making the lands fertile and fruitful, so too does God's word. It comes to the world and does not return until it has nourished and moistened life in every single creature that will receive it. A fruitful harvest, says the Psalm. St. Paul speaks of all creation groaning in labor pains even until now (Second Reading). Human beings too groan within themselves like seeds which break open and push their way through tough ground and then evolve into full trees that stretch up for Christ's light.

Can such rich images apply to you and me? How good is your own soil? God wants to pour his grace into it always. Do you and I groan and yearn for the goodness of God which is already lavished upon us? Do we take time each day to let love in? Or do we listen on Sunday, perhaps with some interest, but then forget everything by afternoon? Or, if my experience is any guide, by the end of Mass! Jesus lists a number of things we might need to correct in order to accept the gifts he has ready for us (Gospel). We might be shallow ground, he says or rocky soil. Weeds might choke us. How discouraging. Must I pretend to be rich soil, though I know my shallowness? No. I must be fully myself and allow God to do the rest. The Indian poet Tagore put it this way: *The cloud stood humbly in a corner of the sky. The morning crowned it with splendor.* Be humble. Join in the revolving refreshment of all earthly things. Open your leaves. Allow the sun.

INVITATION TO GROUP SHARING

1. Rain makes the seed germinate and grow. Apply this to God's grace. Now apply it to God's grace in your life. Discuss.
2. Can you help redeem the world? Suffering is not necessarily a good thing, but what can make it good? Do you readily offer your suffering? How do you handle the pain you can't avoid?
3. Jesus mentions "cares of the world and lure of wealth" as rocky ground and thorns that keep the seed from taking root. What is your "rocky ground"? Are you a busy pathway where the Word is sown but then is trampled? And can the thorns of worldly anxiety choke the Word when it comes to you?

INVITATION TO ACT

Determine a specific action (individual or group) that flows from your sharing. When choosing an individual action, determine what you will do and share it with the group. When choosing a group action, determine who will take responsibility for different aspects of the action. These should be your primary considerations.

CLOSING INVITATION TO PRAY

Give thanks to God (aloud or silently) for new insights, for desires awakened, for directions clarified, for the gift of one another's openness and sensitivity. Conclude with the following:

O God, who show the light of your truth to those who go astray, so that they may return to the right path, give all who for the faith they profess are accounted Christians the grace to reject whatever is contrary to the name of Christ and to strive after all that does it honor. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen