

## The Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time A - Have we tilled our soil so that God's word can produce a good harvest in our lives?

July 12, 2020

Summer is here. My wife loves gardening and spends many hours tending to the lawn, flower beds and veggie garden. She tries very hard to tidy everything up before winter every year but environmental factors can impact the quality of our soil such as winter chills, neighbours' cats, airborne dandelion seeds, heat and drought, etc. ... So, when summer comes: mowing, weeding, fertilizing, trimming, composting are necessary to make sure the soil is fertile to grow and produce "a good harvest".

This Sunday's readings remind us that the soul, like soil, must be good if we expect good things to grow from it. In the First Reading (Isaiah 55:10-11) we're taught that God's word comes down like the rain to nourish the earth and help good things grow. ***"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."*** Throughout salvation history, the Lord has rained down many words to help his creation thrive and grow but with mixed results which Isaiah reminds us are not the Lord's fault but ours. The rain produces fields ripe for cultivation, but it takes work to reap the seeds that will keep the crops going, and keep bread on tables. St. Paul (Romans 8:18-23) also reminds us that **sin did not just mess up agriculture; it messed up the designs of creation itself by diverting it from its purpose.** The Lord created many things for us to love and serve him as well as our neighbours. Paul goes beyond the fertile fields described by Isaiah to the reaping of a glorious harvest: eternal life. Despite our many failings and sins, **the Word came to show us how to follow God's plan for a glorious harvest and help creation achieve its purpose again.**

The Gospel (Matthew 13:1-23) is the **Parable of the Sower**, and the seed being sown is the Word of God trying to make its way into a soul. Through the parable, Our Lord explains the obstacles to the Word of God bearing good fruit. Our Lord invites us to see the difference between hearing and listening, between looking and seeing. Just as farmers till the soil, we have to be active in letting the Word of God bear fruit in our life by cultivating the soil of our soul. **We shouldn't be afraid of welcoming and nourishing the seed of God's Word because God has sown it for a good purpose and he will continue to watch over the soil and cultivate it.** He may ask for something demanding, but he'll be with us every step of the way, and he has plans for something good to grow out of our generosity and sacrifice.

**Parables present something from daily life, but are also doorways to other spiritual and divine insights about God, the "knowledge of the mysteries of the Kingdom of heaven."** It's not enough to just look at the door: it must be opened to discover what lies beyond. When we see the Word of God in this way, we see something from which we can draw profound truths regarding ourselves, our world, and Our Lord, not just once, but constantly. That requires an effort in faith to listen and to see, an effort to open our hearts and open that door into the greater world Our Lord wants to reveal to us. If we don't understand what he is telling us, his Word stays on the surface and doesn't penetrate our hearts, and the Evil One can easily sweep it away before it has any effect. There is an active Evil presence out there that would like us to remain shallow and superficial and someday lose eternity with God, which is why we always need to watch and pray in moments of temptation and seek to understand God's Word with intensity. There's a moment where an insight into his Word causes sensible consolations

and warm feelings, but sentiments are often skin deep and change direction like the wind. If we only listen to feel good, when we start feeling bad we'll stop listening—enthusiasm only lasts so long. **God's Word wants to be with us and help us in our ups and downs; he always has something to say, so whether we're exultant about something or despondent, we need to keep listening, harder if needed.**

We must till our soil so that God's word can produce a good harvest in our lives, but environmental factors can impact the quality of our soil too. There is a lot of "noise" trying to drown out his Word, and not all of it is self-generated. We live in a culture today that can be shallow, superficial, and base: all those things can form a screen on our hearts that prevents God's word from getting in. Our worries about money, power, prestige or pleasure can separate us from his Word: we become more concerned with the passing things of this world and not about building up the Kingdom. If we become attached to those things they won't just drown out God's Word, they'll make us deaf and blind to many other things as well. To be a good cultivator of goodness, we need to dig deep within ourselves. What comes to mind in moments of silence? Concerns that come to mind in a quiet and peaceful moment often help us analyze and address our attachments. A bad environment can choke out the Word in our lives, so we need always to consider whether there are certain places we should no longer go; certain people we should no longer see; certain things we should no longer do. However, the **Good News is that there is good soil in every human heart and given time and effort and a considerable degree of pain, the Spirit of the living God will put down deep roots in our lives, assuring us of salvation.**