

Luke 8:5-15

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Glory to Jesus Christ!

In today's Gospel lesson we heard the parable of the Sower and His Seed. This parable is familiar to many of us as it is recorded in all three of the Synoptic accounts, the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and is read a number of times throughout the year.

As we may already know, chronologically speaking, this is the first parable of the Lord and it is given near the beginning of His public ministry. For before the Lord set out to preach the Good News of the Kingdom of God, He first prepared the people to receive His divine teaching properly.

He set forth His teaching in parables in order to protect those whom He knew would reject His teaching from understanding the deeper mysteries and thereby receive greater condemnation. But to the disciples, those who desired to more fully understand His words, He revealed the deeper meaning of the parable; for how could He who says, "Ask, and you shall receive" deny those who asked to comprehend His teachings.

The Sower is the Lord Jesus Christ, the Seed is the Word of God, and the earth is the heart of man. The parable begins with the Sower going out to sow. The Fathers explain that this can be understood to represent the Son of God leaving the bosom of the Father and becoming Incarnate, taking on flesh, so that He might sow His seed in the hearts of men.

By this Seed we mean not only the teachings of the Gospel but we also mean the very Word of God Himself. Does not St. Paul write to the Galatians that the Seed promised to Abraham is Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God? And when we speak of the Word of God, don't we mean both the Bible and also the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, our Lord Jesus Christ?

And so in the first case, the seed is given to men as divine teaching through the preaching of the Lord, His Holy Apostles, and those whom they have appointed, namely the bishops of the Church and by extension the priests.

And in the second case, the seed is implanted in men's hearts as the grace of God through the gift of Holy Baptism and renewed and cultivated through the reception of the other Sacraments.

As Christians, we must have this dual understanding of the seed for we need both the teachings of the Lord and also His divine grace both of which we receive through the life of the Church.

In fact, this is the very reason why Christ established His Church – to continue spreading the seed of the Word of God. Were not Christ's last words, as He ascended into heaven, "Go therefore and baptize all men, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you, for lo I am with you even unto the end of the world." The Lord said, baptizing and teaching, that is implanting the seed of divine grace and the seed of divine truth.

But unfortunately as the parable explains, few of us choose to receive the seed properly.

Some because of the hardness of their heart will choose not to receive it at all. Others will receive it joyfully but they will not allow it to take root and when temptation comes they will fall away. Still others will receive it but because of the love of pleasure and excessive concern for worldly cares they will not allow the seed to fully mature and bear fruit.

But finally there are those who willingly and actively cooperate with the Sower, tilling the soil of their hearts, so that the grace of God can penetrate deeply, take root, grow to maturity, and bear fruit.

And so each man must be attentive to the spiritual soil of his own heart. He must seek not only to make it initially receptive to the divine seed but also a fertile place for this seed to take root and grow so that in time and with patience it will bear fruit.

Let us notice that in this parable the seed grows of its own accord. Man is not required to provide sunlight or water, for God "makes the sun to rise on the evil and on the good alike, and sends down rain on the just and on the unjust."¹ The only thing man is required to do is attend to the soil of his heart, so that there is nothing found there which will stunt the growth of the divine seed.

But how is one to till the soil of one's heart?

Those who have any experience with farming or cultivating a garden will know the answer to this question, even if they know nothing of the spiritual life. They would say that two things are necessary: hard work and the right tools. Both are necessary, having one without the other simply will not work.

To till the soil of our own heart requires hard work on our part, it requires diligence, spiritual sweat, and it requires us to get our hands dirty. And to uproot the destructive passions which grow in our souls like weeds, choking what has been planted by God, we have to use the tools which the Church provides for us.

And so what are the tools with which the Church equips us to uproot the passions?

To be sure, there are many tools, but today we will speak only about three of the most powerful. Three tools which every single Christian, without exception, must make use

¹ Matthew 5:45.

of, not once or twice a year, but constantly if they want to bring forth fruit in their Christian life. And these three tools are self-examination, tears of repentance, and the Sacrament of Confession.

The first tool is self-examination because in order to uproot the weeds, the passions, we need to identify them. The Fathers tell us that the passions are many: the passions of gluttony and drunkenness which choke the virtue of self-control, the passion of greed which gives no place for the virtue of generosity, the passion of lust which suffocates the virtue of chastity, the passion of pride which rises up against the virtue of humility, and many such passions which dwell within us hindering the growth of virtue.

But of course, as any good gardener will tell us, locating the weeds is not enough, we need to uproot them. And for this we need to dig down beneath the surface. But to get down beneath the surface, we need to soften the soil, and for this the Church gives us the second tool, tears of repentance.

The Fathers tell us that without tears no man can be saved. Without tears for what we have done, what we have become, who we have hurt, the soil of our heart will remain hardened.

So the Fathers teach us to seek the gift of tears, to ask God that He grant us tears for how we have hurt others through our anger or pride, tears for how we have let each other down by not being a good father or mother, brother or sister, friend or spouse, tears for how we have not helped others in need, whether they be our friend or foe, or just someone on the street. And especially tears for how we have offended God by not taking what He has done for us seriously.

God has become man and offered Himself up for us on the Cross, so that we might have a better life, so that we might have eternal life. But how do we respond? By living our lives in the same mundane and earthly way, by concerning ourselves more with the cares of this world than care for the Kingdom of God. Do we need proof?

Well, what are we more likely to do? Attend a weekday service or entertain ourselves in some way, with TV, the movies, our favorite hobbies and pastimes? What are we more likely to do? Examine the state of our own soul or monitor how our portfolio is doing, or worse yet scrutinize the state of our neighbor's soul? And the examples can go on and on.

But let us move on now to the third tool which the Church gives us to uproot the passions, the confession of sins. This tool is the most powerful because when we confess our sins in the sacrament of Confession, we ask God Himself to reach into the soil of our hearts with His all powerful hand and uproot our passions, planting in their stead the seed of the virtues.

By ourselves, we cannot uproot the passions. Perhaps we may identify them, and maybe we might even shed tears over them, but without the sacrament of Confession, we will not uproot them for He who said, "Without Me you can do nothing" also established the

way in which He would forgive our sins, by giving His Apostles and their descendants the authority to bind and to lose, to forgive sin and to retain them.

But let us each of us know that there are some passions and sins which cannot be uprooted and forgiven. And let us listen to this very carefully. The Fathers tell us that the only passions which cannot be uprooted and the only sins which cannot be forgiven are those which we refuse to identify, refuse to repent over, and refuse to confess in the Sacrament of Confession. But every other passion and every other sin, no matter how large or how entrenched, can be uprooted and forgiven by our all-powerful and all-merciful God.

And so brothers and sisters in Christ, let us take heed to our salvation. Let us do our part. Let us cultivate the soil of our hearts, uprooting the passions through hard work and by using the tools the Church has given us: self-examination through which we identify our passions, tears of repentance through which we soften the soil of our hearts, and the Sacrament of Confession through which our passions and sins are uprooted and forgiven.

But let us not stop at this, for we must also sow the divine seed together with the Divine Sower. Let us diligently study the commandments of Christ, implanting them deep into our hearts through the fulfillment thereof. And let us receive the divine grace offered to us directly from the hand of the Divine Sower in the Holy Sacraments of the Church.

For by so doing, the Word of God will grow to maturity within us and we will be found worthy to bear fruit and thereby enter into the Heavenly Kingdom of Christ, to Whom is due all glory, honor, and worship together with His Father Who is without beginning and His Most Holy, Good and Life-creating Spirit, now and ever and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

Glory to Jesus Christ!