

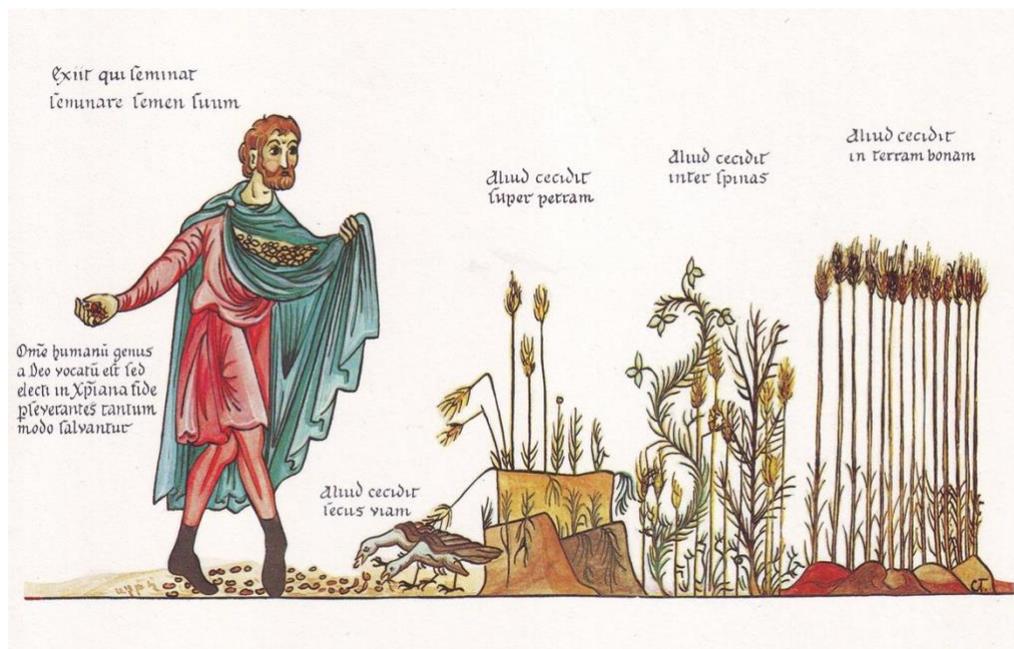
Generosity of God

Homily for the Fifteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time, Cycle A 2020

Isaiah 55: 10-11; Romans 8:18-23; Matthew 13:1-23

Most Reverend Joseph J. Tyson, Bishop of Yakima

Peace be with you! "A sower went out to sow." Thus, begins the famous parable of the sower and the seed. Jesus explains the different kinds of terrain upon which the seed was sown.



The seed sown on the pathway was lost to the birds. Jesus explains that this is like those who receive the word but never understand what they receive. You might as well be feeding the birds!

The seed sown on rocky ground are those who do receive the Word of God with joy. But because they do not have interior depth, the Word of God never takes root and grows.

The seed sown among thorns are like those who receive the Word of God but then daily worries choke off their spiritual growth.

But the seed sown in the well-plowed land are like those who have turned over the Word of God in their minds and hearts. It takes work because they plowed the interior terrain of their souls.

Preaching this parable, the great pope, St. John Paul the Second suggests that Jesus is a good psychologist. Jesus understands that eternal truths are planted in a variety of human circumstances. Everybody who hears the Word of God does so according to their own personal, emotional, intellectual and behavioral makeup. The capacity of the Word of God to grow in our lives is often dependent on the strengths and weakness of our humanity.

This is why this parable of Jesus is not simply about the seed that is sown. It is about the sower himself. We may miss the shock of this parable. But those listening to Jesus who were farmers did not. What kind of sower would waste seed this way? What kind of farmer would waste seed by throwing it on pathways, among thorns and in rocky soil?

Only Jesus! Jesus is the crazy farmer. As St. John Paul the Second suggests, he knows the psychological limitations of humans. So, he wants to be generous. Everyone gets seed. No one is excluded from the Word of God. Jesus wants us to know that that God is so generous he can even waste seed on us. It does not matter if our interior life is rocky. It does not matter if our interior life is choked off by worries and cares. It does not matter if we are busy rushing on the pathways of daily life. Jesus wants us to know that God is infinitely generous. That there is an abundance of seed. That the seed never runs out. Jesus wants us to know that God can lavish his seed on the good and the bad, saints and sinners, rich and poor, the kind and the stingy.

"I dream of a Church with a "missionary option," that is a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so the Church's customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today's world rather than for her self-preservation."

These words of Pope Francis echo the insight of the great fourth century saint, John Chrysostom who notes that Jesus "...preached to all without grudging. For the sower makes no distinction in the land submitted to him but simply and indifferently casts his seed." St. John Chrysostom goes on to note that Jesus "makes no distinction between the rich and the poor, the wise and unwise, the slothful or the diligent, the brave or the cowardly."

Do we do the same? Do we go out of ourselves to reach out to others? Do we call others on the phone to check in on them? If someone can't come to church do we go to them?

Even more do we check the condition of those around us to whom we want to share the Word of God? What is the best way to preach this word? Is it by our verbal conversation? Is it by our quiet example? Is it by our acts of charity? Is it by the example we set? Which combination will most move the person next to us who may never have considered the question of God in their lives?

This COVID-19 pandemic has forced us to change the ways we do things as a Church. It has forced us to become Church in our homes. It has forced us to use new media. But even before the COVID-19 pandemic the climate change of secularization has forced us to find better ways to aim the Gospel message of Jesus Christ to those who have no background in scripture and no habit of Sunday worship. How are we doing in this new environment?

I want to thank the many clergy and parishioners who have volunteered their time and effort to open up our parishes again for Sunday worship. I also want to thank the many clergy and

parishioners who are using various social media to livestream masses, teach religion classes, conduct bible studies and check in on parishioners.

Just as Jesus speaks of a sower who scatters seed upon a variety of terrains, we do the same. May we not only check on the soil of our soul, but may we also be generous in sowing the Word of God in as many ways as possible to those around us. "A sower went out to sow." May that sower be you and may that sower be me. Peace be with you!

Art: "Hortus Deliciarum, Das Gleichnis vom Sämann." Abbess Herrad of Landsberg, c. 1180. Public Domain.