

SEXAGESIMA

Text: St. Luke 8:4-15

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

Every gardener and farmer knows that to reap a harvest one hundredfold, attention must be paid to the soil. Poor soil must be amended with the proper additives, such as compost, peat moss, or other organic materials, or even nitrogen, phosphorus, and potash, among other things. Depending on the crop and the quality of the soil any or all of these things may need to be added to increase one's chance for a successful harvest.

Yet, even then, a successful harvest is not guaranteed. Too little or too much rain, little or no sunshine, temperatures too hot or too cold, and a plethora of pests such as insects, birds, rabbits, deer, or other herbivores can destroy the healthiest of crops in no time at all.

I have watched my wife, Cindy, work hard at finding the right combination of seed and soil for her many gardening efforts over the years only to have deer, rabbits, birds, voles, and moles, and various insects frustrate her every attempt. I have also been witness to her disappointments when my career carried us hundreds of miles away just as harvest time approached.

It seems the Sower of our LORD's parable did not share the concerns of conscientious gardeners and farmers of today. He cast His seed with little care for the quality of the soil upon which it fell. He had little regard for the hardness or fertility of the soil and seemed to regard the pests as an acceptable hazard. Our LORD tells us that as the Sower sowed, *"some [seed] fell by the wayside; and it was trampled down, and the birds of the air devoured it. Some fell on rock; and as soon as it sprang up, it withered away because it lacked moisture. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up with it and choked it. But others fell on good ground, sprang up, and yielded a crop a hundredfold."*

Is it possible that the Sower of JESUS' parable is aware of something that eludes us? Remember, our LORD does not teach with parables for their entertainment value. Parables are not like Aesop's fables, they are not like bedtime stories or fairy tales of the Brothers Grimm which are meant to scare children into obedience, nor are they like the stories in William Bennett's Book of Virtues.

JESUS taught using parables that the Gospel would remain hidden from unbelievers and blasphemers. Therefore, unbelievers see but do not see; they hear, yet, they do not understand. Still, for the elect, JESUS' parables reveal the sacred heart of our FATHER in Heaven so that we may know the depth of His immeasurable grace, mercy, and love as revealed in His SON, JESUS. JESUS' parables teach the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven to God's elect, and yet, they serve an even greater purpose.

Perhaps one of the greatest of the mysteries revealed in the parables of JESUS is that God, the FATHER, is not like us. Thus, while one may assume at first glance that our LORD's parables and figures of speech serve to teach the contrasts that exist between the Kingdom of Heaven and the kingdoms of the world, this would be an erring interpretation. Again, our LORD's parables are word pictures meant to reveal the heart of God.

Let us then, attend to our LORD's explanation of this parable.

“Now the parable is this: The Seed is the Word of God.”

The Word of God is not only spoken or inscribed with ink on paper. The Word of God has bone, sinew, and muscles, flesh and blood, a mind, and a soul. He is God's Word made flesh. He is JESUS, God's only begotten SON—our SAVIOR and our LORD. God Himself reveals this in the first chapter of Saint John's Gospel where the Holy Spirit caused it to be written, *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.”* and also, *“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the FATHER, full of grace and truth.”*

God's Word is JESUS, the CHRIST—the Immanuel who is God with us. He is God's promised “Seed” sent by the FATHER to be planted in the hearts of sinful mankind so that we may be saved. But first, the “Seed” had to die and be placed for three days within the belly of the earth so that faith could sprout and grow.

Evil men would attempt to trample upon Him and stamp Him out. Like vultures, they would attempt to devour Him. They would kill and bury Him to silence Him but their evil schemes would only serve to fulfill the will of God. For *“... unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain.”* These men were unbelievers without any desire to understand what it was they saw and heard. Without the Seed, faith could not sprout and grow. Be warned, Satan is ever ready to rip away the Word of God from your heart *“lest [you] should believe and be saved.”*

“But the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear, receive the Word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away.”

Are these not those who neglect their faith? Joy and enthusiasm, that is, emotion, which must not be mistaken for faith, will only carry one so far because emotions are like addictive drugs and must be fed with more and more powerful and so-called uplifting experiences or they become numb and unresponsive—in effect, they become bored. When faith is not attended to by more than emotions, if it is not nurtured and strengthened by the HOLY SPIRIT through God’s Word and Sacraments, it will die.

“Now the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity.”

Cares or worry, riches, and the pleasures of this life, are perhaps the most insidious and hardest to recognize and overcome, for they take hold over time, and like weeds, grow and choke faith to death without much, if any awareness of them, at all.

Worry *is*, by definition, *unbelief*. It is the result of doubt, of not trusting in God to be God. It is to call God a liar who will not keep His promises or intentionally sets about to deceive. It is to call the “Seed,” who *is* the very Word of God, a lie. Worry places the things of this life before God, just as inordinate attention to pleasure and riches places the temporal before the eternal, obscuring God, obscuring His grace and mercy, and destroying faith. Worry and excessive concern for the riches and pleasures of this life can and will choke faith to death.

“But the ones that fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the Word with a noble and good heart, keep it and bear fruit with patience.”

Even now, even at this very moment, barriers to faith in God and God’s SON, are at work within every one of us. We are not, by nature, good soil. We are sterile, barren, and lifeless soil. If one is not on one’s guard, if one does not pay attention, if one despises God’s “Seed” casting Him aside, one’s heart will harden, and all faith will wither and die.

You are the baptized children of God. *“To you it has been given to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of God....”* Even so, we must be on our guard against the ways of Satan and the pull of our sinful flesh, for the good and noble heart, the good soil, is not good and noble on its own. It is *made* good and noble. The soil that will produce *“fruit to maturity”* and *“a harvest a hundredfold”* is the result of hearing the Word of God and believing what is heard. Yet, even such hearing and believing is not a quality that lies within the human heart, it is a gift of God. It is a gift received with the implanting of God’s “Seed” through the working of the HOLY SPIRIT.

This implanting of God's "Seed" gives us the strength to *"hear the Word of God and keep it"* so that we may *"bring forth fruit with patience"* while withstanding the attacks against our faith that will surely come. This *"keeping"* is not in the sense of *"doing"* as in keeping the Ten Commandments, for this we cannot do. Rather, to keep the Word of God is to ponder the Word of God, keeping it in our hearts and studying it *"for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness..., that [we children] of God may be made complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."* This we do, that we may know where and to whom we must turn in times of trouble, and to whom we are to give thanks in all things, bearing all things with patience.

Yes, we *are* baptized but we still suffer the consequences of sin. We are weak and still fall, and each of us gives in to our baser desires. Thus, we are all guilty, stumbling over the barriers to our faith and salvation. But God, who is faithful and just, and for the sake of His "Seed" forgives us all our sins and cleanses us from all unrighteousness. For God does not play favorites. He sows His "Seed" indiscriminately inviting all mankind to hear and believe. No one comes to the Kingdom of God because he or she deserves it. No one is worthy. We are all sinners, weed-infested fields full of hard and unprepared rocky soil surrounded by demons only too ready to snatch the "Seed" away.

While some deny CHRIST and the salvation He offers, and others drift away, still, there are some who, not because they are good, not because they are deserving, but purely because the "Seed" is good and by God's grace alone, are transformed and given ears to hear and hearts to believe that they are sinners in need of God's mercy.

God provides that mercy through the death of the "Seed" who lives again. He has poured it over you in Baptism and into in and with His Supper; He speaks it into you with His Word, His "Seed" giving to you a *"noble and good heart, [to] keep it and bear fruit with patience."*

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