

15<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, A  
THE WORD OF GOD: THE SEED OF LIFE

*“Imagine a sower going out to sow. As he sowed ... some fell on good soil and produced their crops, some hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty” (Matt. 13: 4, 8)*

***The Word of God is nourishment to all believers.*** It gives us reasons to persevere in times of tribulations; to overcome temptations; to avoid sins; and to love. It is our source of inspiration, encouragement and hope. The Readings of this Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle A, turns our attention to the Word of God: its power and efficacy; our attitude to it and the blessings it brings to those who listen, understand and live by it.

***The prophet Isaiah in the First Reading (Is. 55: 10-11)*** likens the Word of God to “rain and snow” which do not come down without watering the earth, and emphatically submits that “so the Word that goes from My mouth does not return to Me empty, without carrying out My will and succeeding in what it was sent to do” (Is. 55: 11). We can never overemphasise the power of the Word of God. The Letter to the Hebrews did justice with this enduring testament: “The Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Heb. 4: 12). The Word of God has the power to create, to convert and transform lives, to heal body and soul, it is given to teach, refute and correct (2 Tim. 3: 16); to restore; reveal hidden secrets and truths; to prosper and to bless; to punish and to reward. The spoken Word of God has power in and over our lives. However, for the Word of God to take root in our hearts and manifests its manifold blessings, we have to be able to tap into its resources and power.

***This is what Jesus Christ presents to us in the Gospel*** with one of His popular parables – The Parable of the Sower. This parable, recorded only by Matthew, is situated in Chapter 13, where we have a harvest of parables (eight of them). Here Jesus begins to develop what would become His characteristic method of teaching – “the use of earthly stories with heavenly meanings” – that sets Him apart as the “Master story teller of all times.” This follows the discourse in the last two chapters, where there was a rising tension between those who believed and followed Jesus on the one hand, and those who refused to repent (Matt. 11: 20-24), including the

Pharisees who had already started plotting His death (Matt. 12: 14). The Parable of the Sower is the first of these parables which highlights peoples' response or reactions to His teachings. Make no mistake, this parable reflects our today's responses to the Gospel as well.

***“Imagine a sower going out to sow”***: Jesus uses an image very familiar to His audience. Clearly using what is known in the here and now to lead on to what is unknown in the there and then. The sower, in the Palestinian nation of Jesus' time, would often sow his seeds by spreading them abroad as he walked up and down the field. If it was windy, the seeds would be blown to various destinations. This is the image that He used for the preacher and the word. Words, once spoken, the preacher has no control of where they go. It is the duty of the preacher to speak the words, to sow the seed, and leave the growth to the ears and hearts that receive them. The greatest danger here is when the preacher does not speak the word. No wonder the apostle to the Gentiles, St. Paul, admonished St. Timothy to preach the word in season and out of season, welcomed or unwelcomed. Insist on it! (2 Tim. 4: 2). This is the challenge of all ministers of the gospel and every baptised Christian.

***“Some seeds fell on the edge of the paths, and birds came and ate them up”***: The seeds that would fall on the “edge of the path” or the “wayside” as some translations have it, would have no chance of growth because they have no hiding place from the hunting birds of the air. Jesus employs this image to describe those who hear the word of God but without understanding it, the evil one comes and carries it off. There are many things that can shut a man's mind from understanding God's Word: ignorance, pride, prejudice, fear of something new that would challenge one's comfort, resistance to change, unteachable spirit, immoral way of life, committing sins with uplifted heart, and the likes. St. Paul exhorts the Ephesian converts not to imitate the other Gentiles because: “they are darkened in their understanding alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart” (Eph. 4: 18). This aptly wraps up our message here. What, then, is that obex that prevents you or shuts the door of your heart from understanding and accepting the Word of God?

***“Others fell on patches of rock where they found little soil and sprang up straight away, but as soon as the sun came and, not having any roots, they withered***

**away**”: The “patches of rock” referred to the thin soft upper layer of the soil that was few inches above the huge underlying limestone rock. On the soft upper layer, the seeds would quickly grow but because there were no roots, it withered away under the scorching sun. Jesus explained that these are those who welcome the word with joy but in the face of trials and persecutions, they let go of the values of the word. This describes people who are fired by emotions, easily excited; they do not think things through; they love the word so far as it makes them feel good and as long as all lines are falling in proper places. However, they cannot stand up for the word in the face of oppositions and difficulties of life. They are not prepared to make sacrifices for the sake of the word. Personal convenience and comfort are their guiding principles. What sacrifices have we or are we prepared to make for the sake of the Gospel?

**“Others fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them”**: Jesus explains this group as those who hear the Word of God but the worries of this world and the lure of riches choke the word and so produce nothing. In our busy and crowded world of today, it is very easy to get involved in so many things; very easy to prioritise wrongly by placing the immediate and the material first over the remote and the spiritual. How easy we get too busy to even go to Church, to listen to the Word in Church, to reflect on the Word; we do get too preoccupied with other things that we have no time to pray. St. Paul exhorts: “Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God’s peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4: 6-7). What do we worry about? What do we consider the first things? How much time do we give to God?

**“Others fell on good soil and produced their crops, some hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty”**: These are the men who hear the Word of God and understand it; they are the ones who yield a harvest and produce fruits in different folds. These are men and women, young and old, who open their hearts to listen to the Word of God with such receptive disposition that liberates them from the clutches of prejudices and all distracting spirits. Therefore, they are able to hear clearly, understand wisely, treasure them guardedly, and act upon them with the love and fear of God.

Today, the Word of God is addressed to us all; the seeds have been planted: let them not be eaten up by the birds; let them not be scorched by the heat; and let them not be choked up by the misplaced irrelevances of life. We pray that our hearts may be the fertile soil in which the seed, the Word of God, will grow to produce lasting fruits.