

Homily for July 14, 2002
15th Sunday in Ordinary Time Cycle A

By Father Charles Bowes

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

God has profound faith in us.

Tourists to the Holy Land are taken to the “Cove of the Parables,” a little inlet on the Sea of Galilee where Jesus was supposed to have sat in the boat and first told the story of the sower.

It's a natural amphitheater where several thousand listeners could have heard a preacher's voice. And it might indeed have been typical of the man. While the other Jewish teachers labored away back in town, explaining the scriptures, Jesus finds a place where people will come and listen. And he takes his material from the scene right there where fields were being sown – perhaps in the old way, before being plowed. “You know what it's like when farmers go out to sow,” he says, “just throwing the seed all around, even on the paths and among the thistles. But the farmer knows his trade. He knows enough will grow to make his profit.”

Looked at this way around, the parable of the sower and the seed is one of reassurance. It's not about what happens to the seed only, it's not just about the faith of the hearers so much as about the faith of the sower. God knows there will be harvest, whatever difficulties and failures there may be along the way.

When we continue to get lost in what happens to the seed, we get lost in the allegory, the explanation composed later by the early Church as an incentive and instruction to be good Christians. But keep in mind, the parable is primarily about God's faith, about God's faith in God's people and in the world God has created.

But the parable talks a lot about seed, talks about the natural inevitability of failure and success in sowing. Sowing in Palestine can come before plowing. There are the three states of loss: immediate, gradual and ultimate – the path, the rocks and the thorns. There are three degrees of gain in the good soil: 30, 60, 100 – as diverse as the losses. Significantly, the parable spells out how things go wrong (path, rocks, thorns) but not how they go right. The parable points to the law of growth and decline in the kingdom. Although one can understand better how things can go wrong, one is challenged to hope in that mysterious process whereby they go right, challenged to hope and to trust that God knows what God is doing. God's mysterious plan is at work; good results do come, although the bad ones are more readily explained.

The parable of the unpredictable seed and the faith-filled sower teaches us that all things are in God's hands. God has always been sowing. Indeed, from the beginning of the human race it was natural for God to

sow the seeds of knowledge. He is the one who, through Moses, sowed among the people the seeds of the commandments of the Law. He is the one who, speaking to the prophets, sowed the seeds of hope in times of peril and the seeds of challenge in the face of injustice. And through Jesus Christ, our faith-filled sower, God sows the seeds of eternal life to which we can lay claim anytime, day or night, as we turn to the Lord Jesus in prayer.

I know for me in times of stress it is helpful to ask a question of Jesus along these lines: "Lord, how were you able to trust your Father's love in the face of the misunderstanding you endured? How, Lord, were you able to have confidence that God is in charge amidst the confusion you faced?"

Our God does not do business the way that we do. Our God is a careless, faith-filled farmer. The seed gets scattered in wild abundance, and for this we give praise and thanks.

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