

A Homily for 15th Sunday of the Year, 12th July 2020
from Fr Allan

Chapter 13 of St Matthew's Gospel is a chapter of parables. It contains some of the most famous stories that we have heard many times. Today's parable is the parable of the sower. Parables are stories that lead us to a spiritual or religious lesson. When we hear that the sower throws the seed on the edge of the path, or on patches of rock, or amongst thorns, or on the rich soil and then we hear that the seed is the word of God we are challenged to think about the ways that we accept the WORD - (the word now becomes the WORD who is Jesus Christ) into our lives.

I would say that although we might have a tendency to group people into the four categories e.g. those who don't really understand the Word; those whose faith is without any roots; those who allow themselves to be caught up in the ways of the world and those who do understand and allow Jesus Christ to permeate the whole of their lives, the reality is that our lives are a mixture of all four. At various times in our lives we can ignore God's word, or initially we can be very enthusiastic, or we can be overwhelmed by the events of life. (During this time of quarantine and pandemic we can feel overwhelmed. There doesn't seem to be an end to it all. We seem to be devoid of any growth).

So, yes, we hear the parable of the sower and we apply it to our own lives. We might ask ourselves, "Well, how do I respond to God's Word?" This question might be accompanied by feelings of guilt and even sinfulness. If it is then it can be a good thing. We don't need to wallow in our guilt or sinfulness however. This is never a good thing! It becomes a good thing when this assessment of our lives brings us closer to God and what God wants from us in this life. When it effects a change in us.

Fr Brendan Byrne, a Jesuit priest, says that a parable tends to make a short sharp point. Its aim is not so much to teach us a moral lesson but to radically change the way we see things. Its aim is to show us another world.

I think the parable of the sower introduces us to a different world in this way.

By the time we reach chapter 13 of St Matthew Jesus' disciples are showing certain signs of disappointment. They are upset that his message is not receiving the reception it is due. If Jesus is the Word of God then why aren't more people listening and taking note? Why aren't they more enthusiastic? Jesus tells them a story that comes from everyday life. In this rural setting people will have been very familiar with farmers and crop growing. He tells them that this farmer throws his seed in various different places. He doesn't seem to care. He throws it around in an almost wasteful fashion. Perhaps we should call this the parable of the "Prodigal Sower". It is true that some of the seed will be lost but this doesn't seem to bother the sower because when the seed lands on the rich soil and takes root it yields a harvest 30, 60, 100fold. In other words, it more than compensates for the lost seed.

This is a parable about the generosity, the superabundance of God's care to all - even to those who will turn away. God and his Son will never lose heart because of the behaviour of some people. "When the word finds a generous response in the human heart there is no limit to the riches of God's love and grace that can be channelled to the world." (Byrne)

It is this generosity of heart that should lead us to a different world. It should lift us up from feelings of guilt and sinfulness, and onto a world where we feel and know that we are accepted and loved. In the last six months we have seen a world of death and suffering. Alongside this we have seen hardship and financial ruin. We have seen a world of racism, division, polarisation, anger and aggression. We have also seen and experienced great acts of love and charity. I was sent a message this morning that said in order to get a balanced view of the world I don't listen to the news I just look at the love and goodness of the people I know!

Like Jesus we shouldn't lose heart and we should remember that when God's Word is sent out it never returns empty! "It does not return to me empty, without carrying out my will and succeeding in what it was sent to do(!)". (Isaiah 55