

Homily by Fr. Anthony Davis

“... Why do you speak to them in parables...?”

July 12, 2020

15th Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year A)

Is 55:10-11; Rom 8:18-23; Matt 13:1-23

Like the rabbis of his time, Jesus very frequently used parables - short stories and images taken from everyday life - to convey hidden truths about the kingdom of God. Indeed, a good image can speak more loudly and clearly than many words. Jesus used the ordinary everyday illustrations of life and nature to point to another order of reality - *hidden, yet visible to those who had "eyes to see" and "ears to hear"*. Hence Jesus' parables are like "a Buried Treasure", waiting to be discovered.

What can the parable about seeds and roots teach us about the kingdom of God? As Isaiah in the first reading indicates, any farmer will attest to the importance of rain/water and good soil for supplying nutrients for plants' growth. And how does a plant get the necessary food and water it needs except by its roots?

The Holy Scriptures frequently use the image of fruit-bearing plants or trees to convey the principle of spiritual life and death. For example, "Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord. He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought (even like COVID-19); for it does not cease to bear fruit." (Jer. 17:7-8; Ps. 1:3).

So how do you listen to God's word? Jesus' parable of the sower is aimed at the hearers of his word. There are different ways of accepting God's word and they produce different kinds of fruit accordingly. There is the prejudiced hearer who has a shut mind. Such a person is unteachable and blind to what he or she doesn't want to hear.

Then there is the shallow hearer. He or she fails to think things out or think them through; they lack depth. They may initially respond with an emotional reaction; but when it wears off their mind wanders to something else.

Another type of hearer is the person who has many interests or cares, but who lacks the ability to hear or comprehend what is truly important. Such a person is too busy to pray or too preoccupied to study and meditate on God's word.

Then there is the one whose mind is open. Such a person is at all times willing to listen and to learn. He or she is never too proud or too busy to learn. They listen in order to understand. In the final analysis, God gives grace to those who hunger for his word that they may understand his will and have the strength to live according to it.

Instead of thinking of the field as all of humankind, think of the field as representing just yourself. If I see just myself as the field, I see that sometimes I am closed to God's Word- i.e. I get very enthusiastic sometime but my enthusiasm has no depth, sometimes my life is so cluttered with things I have to/want to do, that I have no time left for God. But sometimes my heart and mind are like the rich soil, and I soak God's Word in, and serve him genuinely and faithfully. Looking at the Parable that way, I sometimes see in myself hardened paths, stony ground and weeds. Yet Jesus' Word will enlighten me if I embrace it with an open mind and heart, ready to let it challenge me. But, if I approach it with the conviction that I already know the answer, then I, too, "may look but not see, listen but not understand". This is because God's word can only take root in a receptive heart that is ready to believe and willing to submit.

One lesson from this parable is clear: the harvest is sure to come. While some seed will fall by the wayside and some fall on shallow ground and never come to maturity, and some be choked to death by the thorns; nonetheless a harvest will come!! Ultimately, the seed that falls on good soil, i.e. on the heart that is receptive, will reap abundant fruit.

Therefore, God is always ready to speak to each of us and to give us understanding of his word. Are you hungry for his word? And do you allow anything to keep you from submitting to God's word with joy and trusting obedience? (SONG: "...My Soul Is Thirsting...")