

Homily for Sunday, July 12, 2020 –

It has been observed by many that the older people get, the more they speak in stories. Arguments, advice, contributions to a conversation – they are expressed by experiences shared and jokes heard and stories that relate to the subject.

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Jesus told a lot of stories. The particular stories he told in abundance were parables. A lot has been written about His parables in relationship to other parables in cultures throughout the world. A lot has been written comparing different literary genres, such as fables and allegories and parables.

For the purposes of today, we can simply say that a parable from Jesus was usually a short story teaching one point about either the Kingdom of God or correct moral conduct. Most often His parables turned the world view of – well – the world – upside down.

But then, that is what Jesus did. That is what God does. OR to be more accurate – the worldly view in our Fallen state has gotten God’s view backwards, and Jesus came to set it right. And that looks like He is turning it around, or upside down. And that is challenging. There are many parables that at the end of the day, people still walk away saying, “I still say the person who worked longer should have gotten more,” or “I still don’t think the person should have gotten away with that.”

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Regarding today’s gospel passage from Matthew, let us start from the middle. Jesus is quoting a prophecy from Isaiah [6:9-10] in answer to the question of why He uses parables.

The quote is hard enough by itself in the Book of the Prophet Isaiah. Yet it is so important for the early Christian community that it is wrestled with in Mark and Luke’s gospels, as well as by Paul at the end of the Acts of the Apostles.

Is Our Lord speaking in Parables to deafen and blind so people cannot repent? From what we know of Him, that can be firmly disputed. But Christ is a decision point for all who encounter Him. For those who remain deaf to His words and blind to His works – Christ is a Judgment. Christ tells the Pharisees [John, Chapter 9] at the healing

of the Blind Man, “If you were blind there would be no sin in that. ‘But we see,’ you say, and your sin remains.”

Is He speaking in parables because they will not repent and the parables are another way to get to them listen? That is more in line with Our Lord and all His behavior. He came as the embodiment of the Kingdom. He is the Encounter with the Almighty. Everything He did was to manifest God’s redemption, God’s redeeming love.

Is He speaking in parables so that only those who struggle with the meaning will eventually come to Him – making the distinction between being a member of the Crowd, and being a Disciple? In other words – are they an invitation? Considering His entire ministry is an invitation to come to Him as the Way, the Truth, and the Life; this seems very much His purpose.

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Jesus did not always explain His parables. Today’s is one of those He did. It has three main points.

The First is the extravagance, even the waste of the Sower. Seed was expensive. To scatter among places that would not yield a harvest was foolhardy (Reckless). That is how God is. That is how Jesus is. He spreads offerings of grace and love and forgiveness and relationship with God to all of us – to everyone. That is how much God loves us. No rock goes unturned. No piece of ground is left without seed given.

The second point is that the receiver of Christ’s invitation receives only to the point where he or she is ready and willing. To use the image of today’s parable – to the extent that the ground is rich, or fertile. I use the word fertile for a reason. In our relationship to God, we are all called to be fertile – to be ready for planting. On a retreat many years ago, the speaker suggested that, especially for us men, our challenge is to be fertile – to be ready to receive. Too often we want to be potent – to be the one giving and donating. We are first to be expecting and grateful.

The third point is that we are to be fruitful. Fruitful means many things. But it definitely includes two things.

First – we are to grow in Faith, Hope, and Love. We are to grow in our relationship with Christ, in our knowledge of our beliefs, and our commitment to worship Him as He has directed.

And Second – we are to be fruitful as He is. We are to act as if we have unlimited resources of His grace to give. We are to love, help, heal, feed and clothe, and forgive. We are to share His revelation – yes that means evangelize.

This second point is important. Why can we exhaust ourselves for others? Because His love – which He gives us – is inexhaustible. Why can we share the Christian Religion with everyone? Because it is not for us to judge which ground is fertile and which is not. It is only for us to do as He does – scatter seed – share the Gospel.

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On this last point – it is also worth remembering one other parable of Christ's. Take the log out of our own eye before trying to remove the splinter in another's. That is a good parable in which to also interpret today's parable.

The parable of the Seed and the types of ground is a good parable for us to examine our consciences regularly. It is good to ask questions like: What is my ground like?

Am I being a path, stomped down and hard-hearted? Am I trying to understand deeply, or is the grace of God bouncing off me?

Is my soil perhaps rocky today? Do I find peace only for a few moments and then let other cares and worries and oppressions become more important, so that I have no depth to weather the storms?

Is my soil full of the distractions of pleasure and comfort or worries and anger? Do I see the Faith through political eyes instead of the world through faithful, holy eyes?

Or am I in a place that looks at these alternatives and again abandons them for what is left – a soil that is receptive to God coming into me, filling me, guiding me, and working through me to bear fruit?

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