Let the Word Take Root in Your Life

By Diane M. Houdek

Today’s Gospel message features the familiar parable of the sower and the seed. Preachers tend to focus on the things that keep the seed from growing. They talk about the evil one stealing away our joy and our faith. They talk about the fleeting enthusiasm of those who have fallen away. They talk a lot about the worldly anxieties and the lure of riches that choke religious sensibilities.

Often when we listen to such sermons, we’re worn out and discouraged by the time we get to these words: “But the seed sown on rich soil is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields a hundred or sixty or thirtyfold” (Matthew 13:23).

One way we can focus on the positive message in today’s Gospel is by spending time focusing on the word of God itself. The Lectorary readings for today all point to the wonder of being good soil and all that God does to make us “good soil.” The miracle is not so much that any seed at all actually takes root, but that the word is resilient and fruitful in spite of all the obstacles and that God’s grace and providence continue to nourish the seeds of faith in our life.

Scripture is one way that God is present to us, not only at Mass but throughout our lives. We believe the Spirit of God inspires the words of the Bible. It’s not an instruction manual, a rule book, or a catechism. It’s a reflection of all creation: the world around us, the complexities of human relationships, and the way the divine presence breaks into our world again and again.

It’s easy to get caught up in the intellectual puzzles of Scripture. We may think that if we spend enough time analyzing the words of a passage, we can force it to reveal its meaning. Or we reduce it to something written long ago, in a culture and time far removed from our own.

Sometimes the best thing to do is to read the words of a psalm or another favorite passage from the Bible and let the words wash over us, nourishing us with the simple wonder of God’s presence.

The agricultural images of seeds, fields, and natural events aren’t as familiar to us as they would have been to their original audiences. And yet there’s something about them that raises an echo of the human experience. For example, take time to sit outside and read the words of Psalm 65, today’s responsorial psalm: “You have crowned the year with your bounty, / and your paths overflow with a rich harvest; / the untilled meadows overflow with it / and rejoicing clothes the hills.”

Another good choice is today’s first reading. The Lord, through the prophet Isaiah, says, “Just as from the heavens, the rain and snow come down, and do not return there till they have watered the earth, making it fertile and fruitful, giving seed to the one who sows and bread to the one who eats, so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; my word shall not return to me void, but shall do my will, achieving the end for which I sent it” (Isaiah 55:10-11)

The more familiar we become with the word God sows in our hearts, the more we will hear it speaking to the situations in which we find ourselves. It grows in us and becomes such a natural and organic part of us that we can’t imagine life apart from the word.
• What steps could you take to improve your spiritual soil?

• What deep roots keep Catholics firm in their faith?

• What worries choke out your faith?

When I moved into my first house, the garden was the first chore on my to-do list. It was early fall, and I lined the front walk with vibrant mums, thrilled with my small accomplishment. The mums didn’t come back the following year, or the next. Five years later, that path was worn, weedy, and littered with children’s toys when a miracle occurred: Those gorgeous flowers bloomed lushly.

The parable of the sower tells us what it takes a lifetime to learn otherwise: We never know which of our efforts, if any, will pay off. This is particularly true in parenting, where one set of parents can produce children who range all along the spectrum in every imaginable trait. Parents sometimes feel the weight of every small decision, certain their children’s futures rest upon a choice of daycare, diet, or diversion. The good news is that our children’s futures rest in the hands of our loving God, who is more skilled at parenting than even the best among us. We must still go out every day and sow the seeds, but we can be confident someone else will ensure the harvest.

We plough the fields, and scatter the good seed on the land; But it is fed and watered by God’s almighty hand: He sends the snow in winter, the warmth to swell the grain, The breezes and the sunshine, and soft refreshing rain. All good gifts around us Are sent from heaven above, Then thank the Lord, O thank the Lord For all His love. —Matthias Claudius, translated by Jane Montgomery Campbell

Jesus’ parables drew on the daily lives of the people in rural Galilee. It can be easy for us to dismiss the imagery as quaint and old-fashioned, far removed from our daily lives.

As we become more aware of food security and environmental issues, however, we once again begin to make connections between what we eat and the people and land that produced it. The Slow Food and Locavore movements encourage people to prepare and eat food with wholesome ingredients grown close to where they live instead of being transported over thousands of miles.

For much of the Church’s history, special rogation days were celebrated to ask God’s blessing on the fields and crops. Today many dioceses with large rural areas celebrate special farm Masses once or twice a year.

Even in our increasingly urban United States, the Church recognizes and supports the efforts of those who grow much of the food for our country and the world.

The National Catholic Rural Life Conference supports farmers and advocates for justice in issues affecting rural life. The U.S. bishops have also issued several pastoral letters addressing these concerns.

WEEKDAY READINGS

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