

Commentary on the Readings for July 16, 2023

The 15th Sunday in Ordinary Time

I am sure that we have all had the experience of planting seed or seedlings with great expectations of a bountiful harvest. We take time to till the soil and give it water and nourishment, and then wait for the plants to come forth and produce. Sometimes they do and sometimes they do not; and we never quite know why. That is the way God must look at mankind, the crowning glory of His creation and, like a good Father, wonders "**What did I miss?**" The readings for today use the analogy of farming and sowing seed to talk about how the teachings of God and Jesus, His Son, sometimes produce abundantly; but at other times do not. Can you figure out why?

In the **First Reading**, from the ***Prophet Isaiah (55:10-11)*** we hear the prophet preaching about the word of God coming like spring rain to soften the soil so that the seeds can grow. However, the people of Isaiah's time did not listen to the word of God. They turned away from Him and ignored His word. This led directly to the Babylonian Exile — God's way of punishing His "Chosen People" for their lack of fidelity (See ***2 Kings 17:1-18***). When was the last time you picked up a Bible or catechism to better understand what God might be asking of you, or saying to you?

The **Responsorial Psalm (65:10-14)** picks up the same theme of preparing the soil for planting and reaping a bountiful harvest because the soil was fertile. Everything came together as God expected: each aspect of His creation fulfilled its purpose. Each of us has a part to play in God's continuing act of creation and salvation. But are we doing it with attention and devotion?

The **Second Reading** is from ***St. Paul's Letter to the Romans (8:18-23)***. In this passage, Paul is saying that we human creatures of God are much like those seedlings. We are planted here on earth, not in a random scattering, but in a divinely ordered plan with great expectations and in hope that all creation will share in the glory destined for those who fulfill their role. Paul's last sentence is most important and applies to us today just as much, if not more, than during Paul's time.

The **Gospel Reading** is from ***Matthew (13:1-23)***. In this long passage, Jesus summarizes all of the readings above with a parable. A parable is a story that has a single message hidden within the details. The objective of a parable is to get people to think and reason out the message. In this passage, to save time, Jesus explains the parable and the message. Do you get the message?

The message is quite clear. The word of God is like seed sown with the expectation of reaping a good harvest that is guiding mankind to live according to the teachings of God and the Church. Our heart and mind, soul and body, in other words, our entire being is like the soil. Are we really listening, absorbing and following through with what God is

telling us? In St. Paul's passage above, he says, "We know that all creation is groaning in labor pains even now..." Look at all of the natural disasters occurring all over the world lately: hurricanes, floods, earthquakes and fires. Could this be God's way of getting our attention to return to Him with all our heart? Something to think about during your prayer time this week!

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