

Sunday Homily

12 JULY 2020

YEAR A

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

“Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain”

Matthew 13:8

Illustration

It is well known to those of us who grow things, whether in a window box, allotment, field or garden, that we need to nourish the soil in order for plants to flourish. We dose the small potted plant with liquid feed, we replenish the soil in our window box, we hump compost onto the allotment and fertilise the fields.

In ancient China, every vestige of household waste was carried up to those garden-sized fields that climbed up the hillside. What was taken out had to be replenished and the earth could not produce good crops unless it had sufficient depth and fertility. However good the quality of seed, a rich harvest cannot be achieved without good soil in which to sow it.

Gospel Teaching

In Jesus' day sowing seed was haphazard. Weeds, most commonly a kind of thorn, were not cleared first, but ploughed into the ground. The paths through the fields became hard like roads, and seeds were scattered everywhere, on paths and edges and headlands where the underlying, predominantly limestone, rock came near the surface and made the soil very thin.

To his listeners Christ's description would have been instantly recognisable. He was illustrating his teaching with everyday events, through the language of work, of weather, of nature. Jesus knew that if he spoke in the dry language of the priests, of the Temple or synagogue, the people would not hear what he had to say. Jesus was a country boy and much of his teaching involved the use of symbols taken from nature; he spoke the people's own kind of language, and so they listened to him.

It is easy to become distracted when people speak in a way which does not relate to us, to our needs and our lives; to listen but not to absorb what is said, to miss the crucial heart of a message, which is what happened to many of Jesus' listeners. Some listened but did not want to know. Some heard but did not understand. Some listened and heard but were too frightened of the challenge to respond. Jesus prepared the ground in the way in which a person of the earth would do, with symbols which spoke to the experience and hearts of his listeners.

He valued each person in that crowd and when we value someone we take the trouble to approach them at their own level. The harvest of response we reap is worth every moment of effort.

Application

And what of us? We frequently fail to listen to one another, let alone to Christ! We avert our eyes, use distracted sounds like, “Mmmm”. Interrupting, not allowing others to finish. Do we really listen? How often do you telephone someone and know, by the noise in the background, that the television or radio is claiming half their attention? How often do we ask people how they are because of social convention rather than wanting the truth and the detail of their answer?

If someone listens to us attentively, we feel valued. When someone speaks to us in our own language it feeds and enhances the person that we are, making us grow in confidence and self-worth. This is how Christ listens to us and how we need to listen to him, not only in our prayers but as he speaks to us through others. By this caring we nurture the seed of his love which develops and grows into a part of his great harvest.

But if our soil is thin, what do we do? How do we compost it? By prayer, asking for enlightenment and wisdom; by a good deed, a kind word, sincere contrition for our weaknesses; not by heavy and self-congratulatory penances, but paying close attention to the ordinary events of our daily lives; by being fully present to each person, hearing his or her spoken and unspoken needs. Our compost involves facing and not avoiding life's unpalatable aspects for fear of them troubling us; it involves rising to the challenge of being fully human in the way which Jesus made transparently clear. This is the spiritual fertilisation given by God. When we accept it, it nourishes the life of God within us.

God is with us in the great and in the minute events of our lives. He speaks to us in gentle tones and in language we understand. Listen to him: he is the sower, the seed and the food for growth. Relax: the harvest will take care of itself.

