

Sexagesima – February 24, 2019 – St. Luke 8:4-15

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today we have another parable by which Jesus reveals how His kingdom comes to sinners. Specifically, His Kingdom comes to you by the giving of the Gospel: His blessed Word and holy Sacraments. By these gifts, Jesus' life and Kingdom is planted in you like seed being planted in the ground.

By this planting, God the Holy Spirit, according to the will of the Father, brings forth a miraculous crop in you; namely, repentance for your sin, and trust (faith) in the sacrificial death and glorious resurrection of God the Son. You are given to believe that Christ has paid your sin in full and believe that on that account, you have eternal life in and with the true and only God: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

This crop – this faith – is an absolute miracle, as Jesus signifies in His parable when He says describes the size of this crop as being one hundred times the amount of seed that was planted. No farmer, even with today's great advancements in agricultural technology, can even approach a one hundred-fold yield. And yet, this miracle is accomplished here, in you, by the Gospel. That's why this Holy Mass is also called *Gottesdienst*, a German word that means "God's Service". God is at work here in the mass for you, for your salvation, by the means of His grace. In and through preaching and sacraments, God is planting, feeding, and growing faith.

But in Jesus' parable, He not only describes that work, He also describes the response to His work and His Seed that comes from your sinful nature. You and I, in our sinful nature, attack the Seed. In fact, despite God's infinite power, we are able to prevent that Seed from producing the blessed fruit of God's planting. Wherever the Seed fails to produce or sustain faith, it is because of our own willful rejection of that seed.

For example, in His parable Jesus describes seed landing on the hard, beaten down soil of a road, so that the devil snatches the seed up before it can take root and grow. Now, it might be tempting to focus blame on the devil, but the reason that the devil is able to perform that evil snatching is that the seed could not penetrate that hard surface. Jesus is describing how you and I, in our sinful nature, can willfully harden our hearts against the Seed, the Gospel, as it is planted in us. Such self-hardening is *always* dangerous, whether you are rejecting the entire Word of God, or only certain portions. Repent, therefore!

Jesus goes on to describe Seed that lands in thin, rocky soil. A plant springs up quickly, but the thin, rocky soil prevents deep roots from growing. As a result, Jesus says, when temptation, persecution, trouble or sorrow come like a scorching summer drought, that plant quickly burns up.

Why would some people be like that thin, rocky soil? Let's be clear: not one of us, by nature, is good soil; none of us welcome the Seed planted in us by God. As the Scripture teaches, "There is no one who is good; no, not one." Furthermore, God's Word declares, "No one can say that

Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.” In other words, whenever a person believes that Jesus is Lord, that faith is 100 percent the Holy Spirit’s gift and work in them.

However, Jesus is once again showing how, despite the Holy Spirit’s infinite, divine power, you can make yourself like that thin, rocky soil by your rejection of Him and His Word, without repentance. As a result, the faith that initially springs up in you is easily scorched and dies when you face persecution, suffering, trouble or sorrow. The fault for this failure does not lie with the persecution, suffering, trouble or sorrow. The cause is that you have made yourself inhospitable to the Seed by your rejection and by refusing to repent.

Finally, Jesus describes Seed that lands in the midst of thorns and thistles. The good fruit that springs up doesn’t stand a chance. It is quickly overcome by the competition. But this again is the result of a willful choosing. Jesus is describing idolatry: loving and serving the cares, riches and pleasures of this life as if they give and sustain your life. Your job, family, entertainment, bank account and other such things are good gifts from God, but your life does not depend on them. You can live without them if God so chooses, and none of those things can sustain life beyond this world. Repent!

You have been given to know the mysteries of the faith, including the mystery that you both love God’s Word and His life, and you hate and attack the Seed by which you are saved. By today’s parable, Jesus reveals this to us, and calls us to repent. We must all confess, “Lord, I believe; help Thou my unbelief.” But repenting, our Lord also calls you believe His absolution, the forgiveness paid in full by His sacred blood given and shed for you.

God the Father desires that Jesus spring up and produce His abundant fruit in every single human being. That’s why the sower in Jesus’ parable sows his seed everywhere, without discrimination. He even sows his seed where it has already been sown before: that is, right here in the Mass, in this Divine Service, in order to cause us sinners to again repent, and be renewed, restored and kept in the one true faith, that we might live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness, just as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity. God grant this to us all!

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.