

## Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

By Fr. Bob

There is this story:

*“Can you tell me who made you?” The pastor asked the small boy. The youngster thought a moment. Then he looked up at the pastor and said, “God made part of me.”*

*“What do you mean, ‘part of you?’ asked the pastor. “Well,” answered the boy, “God made me little. I grew the rest myself.” “Growing the rest” is a lifetime job for everyone.*

In the midst of summer our scripture for this fifteenth Sunday talks about Growth.

In the midst of trials and difficulties and obstacles, we are called upon to reflect on the reality that God’s purpose and plan is that we grow.

And, I suppose, when it seems that things are stagnant—that the water is still and the environment is lifeless, we are called upon to have trust and faith in the vibrancy of God’s presence and power in our lives.

In our first reading from the prophet Isaiah we see a parable which was spoken to offer encouragement and hope to a devastated people. Isaiah, the prophet, was their companion in exile and he knew firsthand and shared the sense of loss and desolation which burdened his displaced compatriots. There was a desert-like existence that offered no promise of respite. Nevertheless, the prophet had faith in God and he burned with such fervent faith that his trust and confidence became contagious. Together they believed that despite the how dismal the situation loomed, God’s plan was for their salvation. God’s plan was for their safety and peace and security. And so God’s Word, they knew would bring fruit and justice and respite. They knew that even though they couldn’t see it, God’s will and way was growing in their midst.

Paul admits to his fellow Christians that things are not good. Suffering among the community was prevalent. Distrust and fear and persecution was rampant. Paul suggests that this is because everything is out of sync due to sin—due to the rupture in the relationship with God. But Paul believe Jesus’ mission was to restore, to bring order to allow growth and to bring things in union once again. We may be groaning—but in a sense it is growth pain.

Finally Jesus gives us the familiar parable of growth in Gospel. Our scripture scholars suggest that only the first part—the parable itself—is from Jesus. The rest was added by the early community to explain and give further meaning. But the first part, Jesus’ words by themselves tell us that despite the choking, the rocky soil, the too bright sun—all these obstacles to growth—the harvest will be amazing. Growth will happen. God’s will and Word will prevail. Jesus says the harvest will be one hundred fold. The usual excellent yield would have been 10 fold! And so

Jesus is telling us to expect magnificent things and to assume abundance like we could never imagine.

And so the Word calls upon us to have faith and to trust.

We see people every day whose lives are burdened by poverty and disease and rejection and we know that they are called upon to have faith in a God who is presence and whose life grows in their midst.

We see in our midst violence and hate, exclusion of people because they are different and hatred of people because of fear and we are challenged to know that the Love of God will drive that all out and the Love of God will prevail.

In our own lives, in our families and workplaces, in our neighborhoods we get discouraged because things don’t seem to be progressing—growing—producing peace and brotherhood and sisterhood. But we are called upon to believe that the God who started all good will prevail and bring about the kingdom.

But like the little wise boy we need to know that we need to cooperate in the growing. We need to nurture the environment. We need to trust in the presence of a God who saves even when we are blinded to that presence and when we do not feel that power.

We have models to work with:

Isaiah in the midst of a desert could see spring.

Paul in the midst of persecution could feel peace.

The disciples who stayed with Jesus, in the midst of abandonment and fear could feel his gentle presence.

We look to people like Mother Theresa who in the midst of death and poverty saw beauty; Dorothy Day who in the midst of war and emptiness could see beauty and peace.

We strive, in the midst of our doubts to look to one another, to hold on to one another, to encourage one another. For it is in our relationships with one another—in the support and challenge that we give to one another that we find growth.

Marianne Williamson said: Relationships are the Holy Spirit’s laboratories in which people are brought together for the maximal opportunity for mutual growth.

Let’s use these summer growing times to realize our potential as individuals and as a community for Growing God’s Word in our midst. Let us bring forth a harvest of peace, of love, of care and compassion for one another.

### READINGS OF THE WEEK

Isaiah 55:10-11

Romans 8:18-23

Matthew 13:1-23

July 13, 2014

# 靈 修 生 活

## 撒 種 的 比 喻

呂 漁 亭 神 父

現在我們開始要講幾個天國的比喻了。

耶穌當時在各地治病顯奇跡，許多民眾都為之著迷；耶穌每到一地，那裡頓時人山人海，人人都希望耶穌治病或聆聽祂的天國福音。

耶穌的死對頭法利塞黨人及經師們，見耶穌如此受群眾所歡迎，看在眼裡痛在心裡，對祂曾起了極大的反感；尤其當耶穌公開批評他們一切徒具外表，缺少內心的宗教精神時，更令他們恨之入骨，非把祂除掉不可：「法利塞人出去，商討怎樣陷害耶穌，怎樣除滅祂。」(瑪十二4)

可能從那時開始，耶穌已不能再在會堂內正式宣道了。於是祂只好在路旁、海邊、甚至在無人煙的曠野中去傳佈福音，但群眾依然源源不絕到處跟隨祂！我們都知道，這些群眾幾乎都是目不識丁的農民、漁夫或牧童等等，他們既沒有讀過梅瑟傳下來的古經，高深的天國道理當然更無法理解。我們應該還記得，過去耶穌在會堂內講道，聽眾有不少是經師及法利塞人，他們都是一群高級智識分子，因此耶穌常以「釋經」為證道方式。但這種講道方式，對毫無知識的一般貧民已行不通了。智者善於適應，他們對什麼人能講什麼話；耶穌無疑是一位智者中的佼佼者，於是祂開始向群眾講「故事」，如撒種的故事、莠子及芥菜子的故事、酵母的故事等等。這些故事由於取材於一般性的日常物品，當時的聽眾都知之甚詳，因此也很容易接受。

這些家常的小故事，我們現在都叫它們為「比喻」，福音中一共記錄了五、六十則這類比喻。聖經學家視瑪竇十三章為耶穌講道方式之「里程碑」；也就是說，在這以前，祂所用的方式比較正式及嚴肅，大致以誦讀及注釋梅瑟五書為主。但自今而後，祂開始將用比較簡單的、實際的、一般聽眾所能懂的故事來講天國了。許多文學家在讀了這些比喻之後，均異口同聲地讚耶穌的確是一位「最會講故事的高手」：祂的故事是如此簡潔、如此真實、如此令人一目了然，但又包涵著如此深奧的真理！

在那一天，耶穌從家裡出來坐在海邊上，有許多群眾集合到祂跟前，祂就給他們講了一個撒種的比喻。

撒種的比喻其實很簡單。比喻說有位農夫，他出去在田地裡撒種，有些落在路邊被飛鳥吃了；有些落在石頭地上，因為沒有根，不久就被太陽曬乾了；有些則掉在荊棘叢中，還沒有長大，就被荊棘窒息而死。最後，有些種子則落在良好的土地上，很快就抽芽長大，有結三、四十倍果子的，有的甚至結百倍果子的。(瑪十三1-9)

這個比喻相當特殊，它不但可能是耶穌所講的第一個比喻，它同時也出現在馬谷及路加福音中。我們已知道。三部福音同時記載同一個比喻的只有七個，而撒種的比喻則是第一個，其他六個是芥子及酵母、新郎與禁食、基督之國與惡魔、園戶、好樹壞樹、以及無花果比喻等。

有的種子落在路旁，被飛鳥吃了。比喻中的所謂「路旁」，我們很容易認為就是農地四周的那些小徑，這當然也未嘗不可。但到過巴勒斯坦的人，應該知道他們的農地不像我們的方方正正，田的四周也沒有什麼田埂以示區別。他們的田地往往很長，農夫及牲畜來回拉犁所形成的那條深溝就成了人可以通行的小路。比喻中的所說的種子落在路旁的那條路，指的就是那種深溝。正因為這種深溝既堅硬又缺水分，因此種子一落地，就很容易被飛鳥吃掉。

比喻中的飛鳥，耶穌自己把它解為「惡者」；可能正由於他們的心田閉塞頑固，不肯接受天國的福音，因此惡魔像飛鳥，立刻把天國的種子吃掉！

第二類種子落在石頭地裡，因為那裡沒有土壤，很快就被太陽曬乾枯死了。耶穌自己解釋那是人聽了福音，一時很高興接受，可惜心裡沒有根，因此不能持久，一旦遇到困難就放棄了。天下沒有白吃的午餐，天國是「暴力」爭取來的，一切成功都當付出代價，天國的永福又怎能例外。因此我們當特別小心，一切信仰有它的犧牲及十字架，誰不肯十字架，就不是耶穌的門徒！

第三類種子不幸落在荊棘叢中，荊棘長出來，即把它們窒息了。耶穌說這類荊棘為「世俗的焦慮及財富的迷惑」，它們把福音的種子活活扼死，因而結不出任何信仰的果子來。在大陸我有一個侄子，星期日往往為了賺外快(開出租車)，弄得沒有時間進教堂祈禱！「賺錢重要，還是救靈魂重要。」我只好這樣提醒他。

最後一類種子則是好種子，因為它落在滋潤的良田上，因此能結出豐盛的好果子，有結三十倍、五十倍、甚至一百倍的。所謂良田，耶穌自己解釋為「聽了話而了解的人」；也就是那些不但接受福音，而且更準備按照耶穌的訓言，決定在生活上去實踐的人。這種能活出信仰的人有福了，因為他們將獲得百倍的賞報。

二零一四年七月十三日

本 週 讀 經

依 55:10-11; 羅 8:18-23; 瑪 13:1-23