

15th Sunday of the Year – A
Is 55:10-11; Rom 8:18-23; Mt 13:1-23

Today's readings are about the transforming power of the word of God, when read, preached, and lived. They also tell us not to be disappointed at the absence of immediate results. We must take a positive and optimistic view of our missionary efforts, as we keep on bearing witness to Christ's Gospel. The parable of the sower in today's Gospel challenges us to listen intently to God's Word, to be open to it, and to allow our lives to be shaped by its power. The parable reminds us that man's reception of God's Word is determined by the condition of his heart.

In the second reading, St. Paul reminds us that just as seeds must fall into the earth and die to produce crop, the pain and sufferings, God permits in our lives help our redemption. Paul wants us to wait for our eternal reward while we continue sowing the word of God diligently and suffering for the Lord, as he did. Today's Gospel teaches us that the word of the Lord is the seed, and our hearts and minds are the soil. The seed's good spiritual yield in one's life depends on how fully one willingly accepts and responds to the word of the Lord.

We need to assess our use of the word of God. We need to read the word of God every day, starting with a prayer to the Holy Spirit for the gifts of attentive reading and the ability and willingness to apply the message, we receive to our daily living. When we listen to the word of God as read and preached in the Church during the Holy Mass, we need to pay full attention to the message given by God, Who uses the priest as His instrument. We also need to ask God's special grace to remove all types of blocks, like laziness, anxiety, worries, and the burden of unrepented sins, any of which can prevent the word of God from influencing and transforming our lives. When we receive Jesus, the Word of God and the Source of the word of God, in Holy Communion, we need to ask him to transform our lives so that we may see Jesus in all of us, and share with each of them Jesus' unconditional love, mercy, compassion, and forgiveness.

We need to keep our spiritual soil fertile and prepared for the word of God: We need to keep our hearts open to the word of God, instead of closing it with pride, prejudice, fear, or laziness. We have to remove from our hearts, the weeds like evil habits and addictions, evil tendencies, hatred, jealousy, fear, and greed. We should not allow the trials and tribulations of

this world, the cares of this world, our ambitions, or our desires for worldly success and happiness to choke out the messages that God gives through His word.

A challenge for examination of conscience: The questions we need to ask ourselves are: Am I merely hearing God's word without understanding it? Does God's word meet with a hard heart in me? Am I too anxious about money, security, provision for retirement or old age? Is God's word taking root in me? Converting me? Transforming me? Enabling me to sacrifice? And what about the "fruits" that we are being invited to produce: justice and mercy, hospitality for the immigrant and those with sickness, the dispossessed, the unborn, the single mother? By refusing to consider these things, we may be missing the healing that the Word of God can bring into our lives. The parable of the sower challenges us to see how deeply the word of God has taken root in our lives, how central God is to the very fabric of our day-to-day life. Jesus also invites his followers to embrace the Faith of the sower: to trust and believe that our simplest acts of kindness and forgiveness, our humblest offers of help to anyone in need, may be the seeds that fall "on good soil" and yield an abundant harvest.

What kind of soil are we? How do we respond to the Word of God and to the various Acts of God in our lives? Do we allow the trials and tribulations of this world to overwhelm the tender seed growing within us? Do we pull back when people harass us because we are believers? Do we decide, because things are not working out the way we think they ought, that God doesn't care for us, or that He is powerless, weak, and not to be heeded? Do we allow the cares of this world, our ambitions, or our desires for success and happiness, to choke out the messages that God sends us through the various events of our daily lives and through the various people we encounter? How we respond to the Word of God is the key to how fruitful the Gospel is going to be in our lives. Unlike the situation in nature, we can, as it were, change the kind of soil that we are. God allows the seed to land on the hard paths, on the rocky ground, and in the thickets of our lives in the hope that in those places it will find a place to mature and bear fruit, that those things which obstruct growth will be removed, and that the soil may be just a little deeper than it at first appears to be in those rocky places. Jesus challenges us in the parable of the sower to sow seeds of encouragement, joy, and reconciliation regardless of the "soil" on which it is scattered, and to imitate the seed's total giving of self that becomes the harvest of Gospel justice and mercy.