

Jesus parable of the sower and the seed is a parable loved by the Church because the question the disciples and we ask is, "If God's Word is a word of life and salvation and power, a word that can heal, rescue and revive, then why is it getting such a mixed response? Why do all people not embrace nor absorb the Word of God?" So, Matthew responds with Jesus' parable of the sower. "One day, a farmer went out to sow."

Obviously, back then, there were two methods of planting. One of them used an ox to pull a plow and slowly the seed spilled out row by row. The other method is to scatter seed far and wide, all over the land. It is this second method of scattering the seed to which the Lord refers. Some seed fell on the road, some on rocky ground, some on thorn bush-covered ground, and some on good ground. The seed, the message that Jesus gives us, is filled with power and salvation especially for a world that, as St. Paul says in the second reading, is groaning for redemption, for release from the grip of sin. The seed is good, the difference lies in the ground where it falls.

That should be a comfort for the preacher who was Jesus. He did the best He could but people listened to Him differently while He was teaching at the seashore. Some are the pavement. For them, the teaching is the pass time or let it pass into one ear and out the other. They did not pay attention to what Jesus told them and they never applied it to themselves but to others. It also happens to us very often when we are in the Mass. Most of us get distraction because of the multiform issues they have. Others are like rock where the seed has no roots as people look for passion and great emotion and afterwards go back to business as usual. The word among thorns can be people who debate about what the preacher said. "He used this word, not that. He is unkind by saying this; he is too conservative, too liberal, too devotional, too long, and too short.

And we can apply the truth of this parable not only to preachers but to parents and friends. When something happens to a family member or to a friend after we have given them help and advice and they still do something destructive, we instinctively ask where we went wrong. This parable says to us that we did not necessarily do anything wrong. What all of us can do is sow the seed, by word and example, as best we can. That is what the Lord expects the Church, the teachers, parents and friends to do. After that, there is the mysterious chemistry between the seed and the soil that takes over.

What kind of soil are we? Are we the pavement, where God's Word stays on the surface and anything can distract us from the Word? Or are we the rock that never lets God's Word sink in deeply? Do we reduce our faith to feelings and nice thoughts but never let it shape our life in any serious way? Are we filled with thorns, interests, addictions, distractions, and other priorities that choke off the Word of God in our lives? The question is not whether we hear the Word of God in our life. We do. It comes through Scripture and through the Liturgy. But do we respond to it? Do we embrace it? Do we let it take root and grow in our lives? What kind of soil are we?

The point of this parable is that when the seed falls on good soil, it lets out roots and produces a very good harvest of thirty, sixty and a hundred grains for the one that was sown!

Faith in Christ is handed on and the Church grows. All that we see in the Church, schools, religious orders, parishes, the commitment of so many people to the work of the Gospel are products of seed in good soil.

We can become so preoccupied and frustrated with the seed that fails, that we need this parable to remind us of the seed that falls on good ground. We forget the growing that's going on all the time because things grow quietly. The message to us is to sow the best we can, to spread Christ's Word as effectively and honestly as we know how and leave the rest to the mysterious chemistry between seed and soil.

Some will take root and that will make the sowing worthwhile and there will be a harvest from the seed we have sown. We are to keep sowing no matter how the soil may look, because we never know where it will take root and produce a harvest of a changed life that will in turn change others.

Sow widely and generously and there will be a harvest!