

The Sower, the Soil and the Seed

In today's Gospel from St. Matthew, we once again hear Jesus teaching the crowd – and, of course, His own disciples – through what is usually known as the “Parable of the Sower.”

This parable is so well known – and seemingly so self-explanatory – that one might be tempted to just gloss over our Lord's discourse on its meaning.

But we really need to take just a little deeper look into what the parable means.

It's worth reviewing what our Lord Jesus himself told us:

“The seed sown on the path is the one who hears the word of the kingdom without understanding it, and the evil one comes and steals away what was sown in his heart.

“The seed sown on rocky ground is the one who hears the word and receives it at once with joy. But he has no root and lasts only for a time. When some tribulation or persecution comes because of the word, he immediately falls away.

“The seed sown among thorns is the one who hears the word, but then worldly anxiety and the lure of riches choke the word and it bears no fruit.

“But the seed sown on rich soil is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields a hundred or sixty or thirtyfold.”

What is sown is Word of God ... but how will this Word take root in our hearts if we, ourselves, don't **understand** what the Sower's intention was in the first place?

St. Thomas Aquinas further explained it by describing the three “classes” of soil ... that is, the human heart:

The *first* class of human hearts are those in whom there is lacking the **will** to receive God's Word with faith. They hear it, but they will not open their hearts to it, because the devil and his human agents have succeeded by scorn, prejudice and false explanations in setting them against everything supernatural, that they utterly refuse to believe. For example, the Pharisees in our Lord's time, and also the so-called “enlightened” or “rational” people of the present day.

The *second* class of human hearts have a good will and are religious-minded people, but they are *shallow* and *weak in character*. They receive the word of God eagerly, but their faith does not penetrate to the depths of their heart and will, and lacks firmness and steadfastness. Therefore they fall away as soon as trials and persecution put their faith to the test ... such as the Israelites in the desert!

“The *third* class of human hearts are those who have faith and hold fast to it, but **who do not live up to it**, being quite absorbed in the things of **this** world. They give themselves up to the **desires** of the eyes, the **lusts** of the flesh, and the **pride** of life, and bring forth no fruits worthy of faith. They **have** faith, but it is **dead**.

St. Thomas said that “The three principal enemies of faith and the **life** of faith are, first of all, Satan and his allies, who seek to deprive men of the **willingness** to believe; second, weakness and indecision of heart and will; and third, the [...] evil passions which govern the world.”

Aquinas went on to say “The Word of God [**only**] bears fruit in those who, besides accepting it **willingly**, **cherish** it in a heart **purified** by faith, and [who] **patiently** and **perseveringly** live up to their faith.”

But if our hearts are soil, then do we not also **share** in the Sower's work?
After all, we are **not** simply plots of ground which react in entirely predictable ways to the Word of God. We – His followers – are **also** charged with **spreading** the Good News of Jesus Christ throughout the world ... **planting** the seed of God's message in human hearts everywhere!

I once talked with a young woman who advised me in no uncertain terms that she didn't believe that there was a God but – being “fair-minded” – she had decided to raise her children in an **agnostic** home.

She wouldn't take them to church ... or talk to them about God ... or let them read about God ... or allow them to go to any function that was religious in nature or might even possibly have a religious **component** ... but neither would she present an atheistic stance.

She told me, quite proudly, that she would allow her children to make up their own minds **once they were grown up!!!**

After a moment's thought, I asked her if she planned to do the same thing about **school**.

Would she keep her children at home ... not teaching them anything that might be considered educational ... not allowing them to **read** ... and preventing them from going to any function at which they might learn something? That is, of course, until they were grown up?

“Of course not!” she exclaimed. “How ridiculous!”

And it **is** ridiculous.

Without preparing the soil of her children’s minds and hearts, she was handicapping them ... quite literally starving them ... and consigning them to miserable lives full of doubt, fear, and lack of understanding ... because they would lack the **tools** they **needed** to understand!

Let’s face it. In either of these cases, we have to groom the fields ... weeding, plowing, planting, watering, and fertilizing the soil or the ground will forever remain sterile, or – at best – choked with weeds.

We **must** prepare our children or they may be lost forever.

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And sometimes we have to be the seed that is sown as well as the soil. In fact, that’s an alternate name for today’s parable, “The Parable of the Seed.”

As Jesus's followers, we **must** spread the Good News, the Gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, by **being** the seed that **causes** the Word to spring forth from the hearts of those who hear Jesus's saving message ... in His own words ... "up to a hundred fold" ... !

But we need to **start** in our **own homes**.

Our children need to **see** us praying, going to church, and learning about God and His purpose for us.

And, yes, let our neighbors **see** us cross ourselves as we sit down to a meal at a restaurant.

Let them know that we are **not** just soil waiting for the seed to fall but that we **are** the **seed**, the **seed** that brings the message of Jesus Christ to the world.