

15TH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME | YEAR A
Is 55:10-11; Rom 8:18-23; Mt 13:1-23

16 JUL 2023

One of the most interesting verses in today's Gospel is verse 9 where Jesus says: "*Whoever has ears ought to hear.*" It kind of sounds a little odd, doesn't it? "*Whoever has ears ought to hear.*" It's like it's too obvious. Unless a person has some physical limitation, or a hearing impediment, if they have ears they're going to hear, right? *Or are they?* And that gets us quickly to the point Jesus was making.

In Matthew's Gospel, the disciples ask Jesus why he speaks to the people in parables, and Jesus says that it's because the people "look but do not see, and hear but do not listen or understand." A few verses later, beginning a section of the Gospel titled "The Privilege of Discipleship," Jesus says, "But blessed are your eyes, because they see, and your ears, because they hear. Amen, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it."

Jesus is letting them know – letting us know – that simply seeing Jesus and hearing his words are not enough. What's needed is for us to follow Jesus, to "put on Christ," as St. Paul says elsewhere in Scripture.

"The Privilege of Discipleship." All of us gathered here today share in that privilege of discipleship – as the Apostles did. It's not something to be taken lightly. It is something to be taken joyfully, however. It is also something to be valued and cherished by each one of us. This privilege of discipleship was given to us at our baptism, then to be nurtured as we grew in the knowledge of our Catholic faith. As it is clearly stated in the Rite of Baptism, that faith is to be nurtured chiefly by the parents of a child being baptized, along with the support and help of the child's godparents. It isn't always the case, however, that what should happen does happen. "*Whoever has ears ought to hear.*" If we're old enough to understand what that means now, we're old enough to take responsibility for our own Catholic faith – even if we have to do it on our own. But even then, the Church is there to help us when needed.

Going back to the parable we heard, our main focus is viewing Christ as the sower and his word as the seed, then what bears fruit and comes back to Christ is for eternity. But because of the free will we're each endowed with, not all that should, takes root and returns to God. We can look at each of the Seven Sacraments as Christ sowing seeds in our lives, each one of them "planted" by Christ at key, critical moments to foster something greater than already exists.

Baptism – new birth in Christ; *Confirmation* – a strengthening of our faith through the Power of the Holy Spirit; *Holy Eucharist* – a continuing gift of himself by Christ to allow us to grow more solidly in our faith and in him. *Penance*, or *Reconciliation* – another gift of new life, through the forgiveness of our sins... more growth in holiness and love of God.

Anointing of the Sick – to strengthen and heal us... physically, emotionally, spiritually, according to our need and God's will. *Holy Orders* – the sacrament that provides more sowers so that the harvest collected is even more bountiful than ever! And, *Matrimony* – the sacrament that works to sow seeds in the life of another, and in the precious lives of others who come later because of that holy sacrament. So, the Seven Sacraments are like seven major rows of crop in our lives. How well do we tend to them? How often do we reap the harvest they offer? Do they truly offer us a harvest of nourishment and hope in our lives... or do we let them lie dormant?

If we change it a bit, and view the sower being us, what do we sow? What have we sown in our own lives, and in the lives of others? Has it been positive and good for us and them? And if not, can it be changed? We can always pray for them – and ourselves. Taken from yet another viewpoint, what have others sown in our lives? What have we allowed others to sow in our lives? What have we allowed God to sow in our lives? The aspect of others sowing things in our lives goes two ways: some of it has been good, and some of it we would have been better off without. But the good can be very powerful, and ultimately, I think, it can make the “not-so-good” kind of irrelevant, and not worth focusing on – no matter what went on in the past. That requires work though. In a document from the U.S. Bishops one time, they made the comment, “Mature faith demands the hard struggle of thinking and choosing.” That's what we need to remember when we're dealing with some of these things that can affect our faith life. Some things are better off *not* sown in our lives, and, because we have a free will to choose evil – which we sometimes do – we most certainly have a free will to choose good at any time. We ultimately are in control of what is important in our lives.

Earlier I asked, what have we allowed God to sow in our lives? Well, what does God offer? He offers eternal, unconditional love; He offers hope; He offers peace; He offers His Holy Spirit to guide and strengthen us; He offers us life over death through the offering of His Son, Jesus Christ, on the cross, for our redemption. He offers us eternal life with Him. But again, for a third time, the question: What have we allowed God to sow in our lives? And, what have we *not* allowed God to sow in our lives? That's something to answer in the quiet of our hearts.

In the Parable, Jesus told us not all the seed fell on rich soil. Some of it fell on rocky ground, some of it among the thorns. But the seed that fell on the rich soil produced a bountiful harvest. Jesus said, “... the seed sown on rich soil is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit...”

May we hear and understand – and may we have and recognize that “mature faith [that] demands the hard struggle of thinking and choosing.” And, may we grow in our faith, to continually think well, and choose better.

