

Homily of Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time of Year A

The readings of today encourage us to dispose ourselves so that the word of God we receive may bear fruit. St. James says, “Be doers of the word and not hearers only, deluding yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his own face in a mirror. He sees himself, then goes off and promptly forgets what he looked like. But the one who peers into the perfect law of freedom and perseveres, and is not a hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, such a one shall be blessed in what he does” (James 1:22-25).

The first reading refers to the word of God as ‘rain’ and ‘snow,’ and refers to human beings as ‘earth’ (ground). The word of God is supposed to water us, so that we become fertile and fruitful. No ground can be fertile and fruitful without water. In the same way, no one can be spiritually fertile and fruitful without the word of God.

There are various types of ground. Examples are rocky, sandy, clay, loamy, and so on. Rocky ground does not admit water. Water instantly runs off from it. Sandy ground admits water briefly and releases it immediately afterwards. Clay ground accepts water for a longer time, but when the water dries up it leaves the clay ground so hard that plants are unable to survive in it. Loamy ground is the rich soil. It retains water, and plants grow in it. The way we reject or accept or retain the word of God, and the way we act or not act on the word we received, show the kind of ground we can be likened to.

Jesus explains this further in the Parable of the Sower. Some seed fell on the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky ground, where it had little soil. It sprang up but lacked root, and was scotched by the sun, and it withered. Some fell among thorns, and was choked by the thorns. The seed that fell on rich soil bore rich harvest: thirty fold, and sixty fold and hundred. God is the sower. His word is the seed. Human beings are the ground. The various types of ground represent how we reject or accept the word of God. When we receive the word and do what the word says, we bear rich and lasting fruit.

In our world today, the number of people who go to Mass to be fed by the word of God has reduced. The number of those who engage in reading and studying the Bible to be spiritually nourished has reduced. Therefore, the number of people guided by the word of God has reduced. Men and women trust human-made rules and regulations such as constitutions, decrees, laws, codes, canons, edicts, bills, and the like, over and above the word of God. Jesus criticized the Pharisees, the Sadducees and the Scribes who behaved the same way. Jesus said to them, “You nullify the word of God in favor of your tradition that you have handed on. And you do many such things” (Mark 7:13).

Shelves in bookshops and the internet are saturated with publications on “How to...” and “Teach Yourself...” Meanwhile, the “word that comes from the mouth of God” (Mathew 4:4) is neglected. Some people pride themselves for reading books of tens and hundreds of pages of books within a limited time, but they cannot read a few verses of the Bible in a day. All human-made laws, rules and regulations are limited. The word of God is unlimited. Unfortunately men and women do not realize that the Bible has solution to every human problem. Unfortunately too, some persons abandon their Bibles on their bookshelves. We are encouraged again today to read the word of God, listen to it, pay attention to it, reflect on it, refer to it, consult it, pray with it, stand by it, be guided by it, believe in it, proclaim it, and act on it. By so doing, we become the rich soil that bears fruit in thirties, sixties and hundreds.

Some texts that teach us the power in the word of God:

- “Constantly read this law and meditate on it day and night that you may truly do what it says. So shall your plans be fulfilled and you shall succeed in everything” (Joshua 1: 8).
- “Isn’t my word like fire, like hammer that shatters a rock?” (Jeremiah 23: 29).
- Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Psalm 119: 105).
- “Finally use the Helmet of salvation and the Sword of the Spirit, that is the word of God” (Ephesians 6:17).
- “For the word of God is living and effective, sharper than any two-edged sword. It pierces the division of the soul and the spirit, of joints and marrow, and judges the intentions and thoughts of the heart” (Hebrews 4: 12).

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