

Homily of Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time of Year A, 2020

Isaiah 55:10-11; Psalm 65:10-14; Romans 8:18-23; Matthew 13:1-9

The first reading can be given two interpretations. First, it is Prophet Isaiah's admonition to the people of Israel to accept the word of God because it is life giving and must surely come to fulfillment. He used two familiar weather elements, rain and snow, to describe the effects of the word of God. It makes human beings fertile and fruitful. Without God's word human beings become wasteland.

Second, it is one of Isaiah's prophecy about Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh. He came forth from God, and only returned to God after doing God's will and achieving the end for which God sent him, which is the salvation of the world. He is "the rain and snow" from heaven to "water the earth, making it fertile and fruitful."

In the second reading, St. Paul describes creation's suffering, pain, and futility until the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ, came and set creation free, and brought creation to share in the glorious freedom of the children of God. By adopting and redeeming us, we are, therefore, supposed to bear the first-fruits of the Spirit which St. Paul lists in Galatians 5:22-23 as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

In the Gospel, Jesus gave us the Parable of the Sower and, also, its meaning: "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" (Matthew 13:19-23).

The word of God is the seed, and we are either the path, or the rocky ground, or among thorns, or the rich soil where the word is sown. We pray not to be the path, or the rocky ground, or among thorns. We pray to be the rich soil so that we can bear the type of fruits mentioned above. St. James encourages us, "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).

Unfortunately, men and women depend on human-made rules and regulations over and above the word of God. Jesus criticized the Pharisees, the Sadducees and the Scribes for behaving that 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). He also said to them, "You are misled because you do not know the scriptures or the power of God" (Matthew 22:29).

All human-made laws, rules and regulations are limited and at some point become obsolete. But the word of God is unlimited and everlasting. Jesus says, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away" (Matthew 24:35).

Unfortunately, men and women do not realize that the Bible has solution to every human problem. Unfortunately, too, some believers abandon their Bibles. St. Jerome tells us that ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ. 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, further, reveal to 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).
- "Everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and buffeted the house. But it did not collapse; it had been set solidly on rock" (Matthew 7:25).
- "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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