

My Brothers and Sisters,

As much as it is good to get away, it is also always good to come home.

It seems to me that last Sunday's Gospel and today's Gospel suggest that our response to God, our faith, is affected both by our own openness to faith and by the existence of sin.

In last Sunday's Gospel, Jesus told the parable of the sower and the seed. As you may remember, some seed fell along the path where it was eaten by birds. Some seed fell on rocky ground and therefore developed no roots and was scorched by the sun. Some seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked the plants. Finally, some seed fell on good ground, grew, and produced much fruit.

The seed represents God's Word, and the four types of ground represent four possible responses to God's Word. When Jesus explained the parable to his disciples, he explained it in the context of his own times. Today I would like to use our categories to explain it.

The path represents the close minded, those who close their ears, their minds, and their hearts to God's Word and to faith. The rocky ground represents those who hear God's Word but whose faith is superficial. They might believe all the Church believes; they might live good lives; but they have done little or nothing to deepen their faith so that when they are confronted by the complexities of life or the challenges of real life, their faith does not survive. The thorn patch represents those who allow all the other priorities in their lives to take precedence over their faith. Finally, the good ground represents those who upon hearing God's Word nurture it and, therefore, deepen their faith.

In today's Gospel, Jesus tells the parable of the good seed and the weeds. Here Jesus introduces another element into the equation, the reality of sin. The weeds might represent those who are bad influences on us. They might also represent a culture and media that are increasingly non-Christian, even non-religious, and sometimes even anti-Christian, anti-religious. They might represent our own sinfulness and selfishness. The bottom line is that our response to God's Word is affected not only by our openness to it but also by others, culture and the media, and our own sinfulness.

My brothers and sisters, today's Gospel also offers two parables of the Church. Although the parables refer to the kingdom of heaven, the Church foreshadows the kingdom. The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, the smallest seed, which grows into the largest plant. This reflects the missionary dynamism of the Church. Beginning with twelve apostles and a few disciples, the Church has spread throughout the world. I would argue that the Church's primary mission is to make Christ real and present in every place and time in order to bring others to Christ. We bring Christ to others to bring others to Christ.

Finally, the kingdom of heaven is like yeast that leavens a batch of dough. In other words, we are called to make a difference in the world. In the midst of all the problems in the world, we, the Church, are called to show all peoples of the world all that God wants the world to become: a community of truth and life, a community of holiness and grace, a community of justice, love, and peace.