

15<sup>th</sup> Sunday per Annum - A  
Isaiah 55:10-11;  
Romans 8:18-23;  
Matthew 13:1-23  
Little Flower - 7/16/17

My Brothers and Sisters,

In today's Gospel, Jesus tells the familiar parable of the sower and the seed. All three readings today speak to us about the relationship of nature, grace, and faith.

In his letter to the Romans, St. Paul wrote that all creation, including us, "*is groaning in labor pains even until now.*" What St. Paul is telling us is that all creation is oriented to God. This is even more true of us. As St. Augustine wrote, "My heart will never rest until it rests in you, O Lord." In other words, human nature is such that only God can satisfy the deepest longings of our heart.

At the baptism of infants, parents and godparents reject sin and profess faith in the name of the infant. Since infants cannot reject sin and profess faith in their own name, their baptism powerfully proclaims that faith, grace, and salvation are ultimately gifts from God.

In today's parable, God sows the seeds of grace and faith. The seeds, however, are not magical. Whether they develop or not depends on the disposition, or the ground, of the persons who receive them. In the parable, Jesus describes four common dispositions: those who hear without any understanding, those whose faith has no depth, those whose priorities are disordered, and those who hear and understand and, therefore, bear much fruit.

Of course, we know that caring for a garden or flowers requires more than good seeds and good ground. The garden or the flowers require nurturing. First, the garden or flowers need water. In today's first reading, the prophet Isaiah compares God's word to the rain and snow that do not return to God until they have watered the earth. God's love for us is the one constant in our lives. God never stops pursuing us, speaking to us in the depth of our hearts and calling forth the best in us from within.

However, we, for our part, also have to nurture our faith. Just like a garden or flowers that are unkempt, our faith will wither and die if we do not nurture our faith. All the recent popes have emphasized the importance of a personal relationship with Jesus. Since prayer is our intimate conversation with God, daily prayer is essential to have a living relationship with Jesus. Also, religious education and formation are important not only for children but also for adults. Of course, parents have a special responsibility to provide for the religious education and formation of their children. As Catholic Christians, the sacraments are our privileged encounters with Christ, especially the sacraments of Eucharist and Reconciliation. At the Eucharist we are fed, nourished, from two tables, the table of God's Word and the table of the Eucharist. Finally, our faith is nurtured when we live according to God's word by keeping his commandments and by loving and serving others, especially those who are marginalized or in need.

My brothers and sisters, our human nature instinctively draws us to God. God has planted the seeds of grace and faith within each of us and pursues us relentlessly. However, just as gardener must nurture his garden or flowers, we have to nurture our faith. At the same time, our faith is often challenged. Last Tuesday, the first reading told the Old Testament story of Jacob wrestling with God. We often have to wrestle with God and with faith when we are confronted with illness or death, either our own or of someone we love. We often have to wrestle with God and with faith when we are confronted by great tragedies or terrible evil. When we do, our faith will grow deeper and more personal and we will grow closer to God and to Jesus.