

15th Sunday per Annum - A
Isaiah 55:10-11;
Romans 8:18-23;
Matthew 13:1-23
Little Flower - 7/12/20

My Brothers and Sisters,

God's word and our response to his word are the focus of today's readings. Today Isaiah, Jesus, and Paul use images to proclaim God's word. For us to receive the full impact of their message, we must reflect on the images themselves in light of our own experience.

Isaiah uses the images of rain and snow. Rain and snow water the earth and make it fertile and fruitful. We know how important the right of amount of rain is to the farmers. Too much or too little are equally problems for them. As a child, my father lived on a farm. I remember him often saying how a slow, steady, gentle rain was better for all living things than a fast, driving, heavy rain.

According to Isaiah, God's word is like the rain. It does not return to the sky until it has accomplished its purpose. I think we must believe that God's word is like the slow, steady, gentle rain. God's word is persistent but gentle, always announcing the gifts of God's love, always inviting us to accept these gifts.

However, when we speak about God's word, we can be talking about it on two different levels. As Christians, we believe that God's Word, first of all, is Jesus Christ. Although the Western Catholic Church focuses on redemption, the Eastern Catholic and Orthodox churches focus more on divinization. Through grace, God calls forth the best in us. Second, God speaks to us in multiple ways. God's word, with a small w, comes to us in multiple ways: through nature, through personal experience and community experience, through others, and through Scripture, prayer, and sacraments. All of these nurture our faith and call forth the best in us.

If Isaiah focused on the word, Jesus focused on the hearers of the word. The sower went out to sow seed. The seed represents his word. The soil represents us. The difference is where the seed falls. We are different in how we receive God's word.

Jesus categorized the differences in people. In our language, we might term them the close-minded, the superficial, the preoccupied, and the receptive. The close-minded might hear the word, but the word has no impact on them. The superficial might talk about faith, but faith plays no real part in their lives. The preoccupied have so many concerns that they cannot give the time and space to develop a living relationship with God. The receptive allow God and his word a home in their hearts. They give God time and space in their lives, allowing a relationship to grow and develop.

We can carry the image one step farther. Those who have gardens know that much can be done to nurture the things that grow. Faith has to be nurtured both in ourselves and in our children. All the recent popes have emphasized the importance of a personal relationship with Jesus, the Word of God. Parents need to focus on nurturing the faith of their children. Since prayer is our intimate conversation with God, children need to see prayer modeled in their homes. Parents have a special responsibility to provide for the religious education and formation of their children. As Catholic Christians, the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, are our privileged encounters with Christ. Our children need to see attendance and participation at Sunday Eucharist modeled, and they need to attend and participate. Finally, our children's 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, on May 24, 2015, Pope Francis issued his encyclical *Laudato Si': On Care for our Common Home*. Today's second reading reminds us that the world's future is intimately linked to the choices we make, including the environmental choices we make. God has entrusted the world to us to make the world a better place for all people today and in the future.