

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

My Brothers and Sisters,

As good as it is to be away on vacation, it is always good to return home, and Little Flower is my home. This is the first time I have been gone for three successive weekends.

Whenever I hear today's reading from the Prophet Isaiah, I am reminded of my father, who grew up on a farm in Ireland. Whenever it rained, he would comment that a slow, steady rain is best. When I hear today's first reading, I picture a slow, steady rain. God's word is like the slow, steady rain that waters the earth and brings forth life.

In today's Gospel, Jesus tells the parable of the sower and the seed. Today's Gospel, then, invites us to reflect on faith. From a purely human perspective, our faith is unbelievable. For example, it is unbelievable that the Son of God became human, suffered and died for us, and then rose from the dead. Likewise, Jesus' Real Presence in the Eucharist is unbelievable. Therefore, it is no wonder that people struggle to believe. St. Paul, however, wrote, *"...we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are called, Jews and Greeks alike, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God"* [1 Cor. 1:23-24].

While I was on vacation, I had the opportunity to discuss faith with several young adults. For example, I talked with one young woman who just graduated from high school who has a strong, personal faith. I always wonder why some people believe so strongly and other good people not so strongly or not at all.

The parable in today's Gospel reminds us that different people respond differently to God. The seed sown on the path represents those whose minds and hearts are closed to revelation and faith. The seed sown on rocky ground represents those who make no effort to grow or deepen their faith. The seed sown among thorns represents those who are preoccupied with, for example, pleasure, power, prestige, success, and/or wealth. The seed sown on rich soil represents those who are open to faith and are willing to nurture that faith. What kind of ground are we?

Anyone who has ever tried to grow anything knows how important both water and soil are for the plant. However, we also have to nurture what we want to grow. Therefore, we have to try to nurture our faith and the faith of others, especially the faith of our children. Nurturing the faith of children is one of the most important responsibilities of parents.

However, the interplay between God's self-communication and our faith does not tell the whole story. Our faith or lack thereof is profoundly influenced by the people and environment that surround us: our family, their beliefs and religious practices or lack thereof, our parish, the schools we attend or attended, our friends, our social group, and our significant others. The perspectives and values of the world we live in, especially as mediated by social media, profoundly affect our faith.

We also have to look at our own individual faith journey. The faith of younger children is the faith of their families. The second stage is affiliative faith. As children grow older, their faith often becomes the faith of the community or communities of which they are part. For example, when I was in grade school, most of us believed exactly what Sister told us to believe. The third stage is searching faith. This is the faith of adolescents and sometimes young adults. The final stage is personal or owned faith. It is when we answer Jesus' question, *"But who do you say that I am?"* [Mt. 16:15]. Unfortunately, some people are never able to answer the question.

My brothers and sisters, today's reading from Paul's Letter to the Romans reminds us that all of God's creation is interconnected. One might say the fate of the world is intimately tied to the choices we make as human beings, hence the importance of our care for creation and our efforts to eliminate weapons of mass destruction.