

HOMILY SUNDAY 15-A
“Learn to Listen – Dare to Respond”
(Isaiah 55:10-11; Psalm 65; Romans 8:18-23; Mt 13:1-23)

As Jesus was walking along one day, he came across a man sitting by the road crying and asked him what was wrong. The man replied that he was blind. Jesus laid hands on him; said “Be healed”; his sight returned and the man went away praising God. Later Jesus came across a second man who was crying and likewise asked him what was wrong. The man replied that he was crippled. Jesus laid hands on him; said “Be healed”; his limbs were restored and the man went away praising God. Finally Jesus came across a third man sitting by the road crying. Jesus asked him what was wrong, and the man replied that he was a bishop. So Jesus sat down and cried with him.

Has the Word of God ever changed your life?

Learn to listen; dare to respond.

Bernadette Gasslein, in her insightful commentary on this Sunday’s gospel in the *Living With Christ*, speaks about the unique power of God’s word among the plethora of words that bombard us each day in our modern society. She highlights key phrases from the gospels and reminds us that proclaiming the Scriptures during the liturgy is more than just reading – it is an event in which God acts. Then she closes her reflection with this striking sentence: Learn to listen; dare to respond – it’s worth your life.

How true that is. The Word of God can change our lives. Let us do as she says - learn to listen and dare to respond.

Learning to listen would be equivalent to what Jesus has to say about the types of soil in the gospel. I love to garden, and one of the main concerns I have each year is to prepare the soil well. Last fall I added fertilizer, peat moss and manure. This spring we rented a big tiller to work the soil deeper, then borrowed a smaller one to break up and mix the soil well. Using plots only four feet wide makes it possible to garden without ever stepping on the soil. I made sure the garden was weed free before seeding it, and continue to ensure that it remains weed free. That is not hard for the ground is soft and the weeds easy to pull out. And now we are enjoying a clean, green, growing garden.

Gardening this way is a spiritual experience for me. It reminds me of the much greater importance of making sure that I am good soil for God’s word. The parable speaks of a hard path. I must strive to have a humble, open mind that is teachable and does not fear the truth. The parable speaks also of a stony path. I must strive to keep up my enthusiasm for God’s Word and commitment to reading and studying God’s Word. The parable then speaks of weedy ground. I must be single-minded in my activities and keep my priorities straight, so that I do not get distracted by secondary things, good as they may be. Then I will be that good soil, ready to listen to God’s Word.

Gasslein in her commentary invites us to dare to respond. What is the response that our Lord wants? Jesus calls it a harvest – 100, 60, 30 fold. Apparently a harvest of 10 – 15 fold would be above

average in Palestine at the time of Jesus. It is obvious that God really wants our whole-hearted response. In terms of gardening, we all know what a lack of response feels like. Last year the strawberries we planted grew luxuriously, and we waited with great anticipation to many juicy strawberries, but for some reason and to our great disappointment, none came. There was no harvest.

The response or harvest that Jesus wants of us is to hear his Word, and act upon it; to do it. In the beginning of his public ministry, Jesus asks us to do two things: repent and believe. He speaks about revealing to them the secrets of the kingdom. He then proceeds to reveal that secret in the words, “lest they turn and I would heal them.” This secret is buried in the parable like a gold nugget in the ground. Repentance, forgiveness and healing are the secret to the kingdom. We are to see ourselves in the light of God’s Word, and let go of words, actions, thoughts and attitudes that are not in accord with that Word. We can especially examine our lives, confess our sins, receive God’s forgiveness, pray for healing, change our ways, and strive to do God’s will in our lives. The biblical word for this response is *metanoia*, which means conversion, turning our lives around.

To believe in the Word of God, is to stake our lives on it. It is to put our faith in Jesus as Messiah, Lord, Savior, as the Son of God. It is to walk in a prayerful, loving relationship with him. One way that we can do that is to practice a way of praying called *Lectio Divina*. This method of prayer is very simple and involved four steps: *lectio* or reading; *meditatio* or meditation; *oratio* or praying, and *contemplatio* or contemplation.

First, read a passage of scripture prayerfully, paying careful attention to the words. Second, study that passage. Read a commentary and think about what that passage is saying. Third, use the words of that passage to pray for others or your needs. Lastly, set everything aside and just be there in God’s presence, trying not to think or even feel anything. Simply believe that God is doing whatever God wants to do in your life. This kind of prayer, over the long run, can be very transformative. As Bernadette Gasslein puts it, “Dare to respond – it’s worth your life!”

In this parable, Jesus is the sower. The Word of God is the seed. That seed is powerful. An image of the power of God’s word can be seen in the 5,000 year old seeds that were found in an Egyptian tomb by archeologists that began to grow when planted! God, the sower, spreads his Word liberally all over the world. And he expects and hopes for a bountiful harvest. It is up to us to make sure that we are that good soil open to God’s word. Any soil, no matter how well prepared, is barren until the seed is placed within it. Our task is to be ready to receive that Word of God and live it in our lives.

Some years back I prepared a young couple for marriage. They had struggled with communication problems and with addictions, and honestly addressed these issues during their preparation. I was delighted when they asked to come to confession even before the rehearsal, and my joy grew even deeper when I realized at the banquet that they had decided to have a non-alcoholic punch for all the guests. They really took seriously the Word of God that they had heard during their preparation, and let it touch their lives. They are now harvesting a meaningful, rewarding and long-lasting relationship in their marriage and family life.

The Eucharist that we celebrate now can be a living out of the parable we just heard. We have gathered as the soil of God’s people, ready to receive the seed of God’s Word proclaimed from the lectionary, and the Word of God made flesh in communion. We are then commissioned to go out,

forgiven and healed, to spread this transformative power of God's Word to others.

So - learn to listen; dare to respond – it's worth your life.