

Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time A/2011

The readings of this Sunday invite us to meditate on the role the word of God plays in our lives and the way we react to it. In the first reading, the prophet Isaiah reassures the people of Israel who were in exile that God will keep his promise to set them free.

God's word of promise that he has given is like the rain and the snow. When, indeed, the rain and snow come on earth, they will never return without watering the land, fertilizing the soil and making the plants bear fruit. In the same way, the word that comes out of the mouth of God is never void, but rather it will achieve the end for which God sends it.

What is behind this text is the idea that God is always faithful. In fact, in whatever situation the people of God might find themselves, God is faithful enough to intervene in their favor. That is why, when he gives a promise, he will carry it out at all cost for the glory of his name and the good of his people. The people need just to be patient and to trust him. A second insight is the idea that the word of God is efficient and performative. When God says something with his word, he means it. For that reason, God's word is capable of fulfilling what God wants to achieve with it.

That efficiency of the word of God clarifies what is at stake in today's Gospel as Jesus talks about the parable of the sower. Like in the case of a farmer who works in a field, Jesus singles out four different situations in which we might find the word of God, namely the path, the rocky ground, the thorns and the rich soil.

The path or the road surface, the rocky ground, the thorny field or the rich soil symbolize the dispositions of heart of those who listen to the word of God. If that is the case, one of the points of the parable is to tell us that as the growth of the seed in a field depends on the quality of the soil, so the success of the word of God depends on the openness of heart of those who receive it.

First of all, we have the listeners who have a heart like a road surface. Those are people who certainly listen to the word, but they have a closed mind. God's word does not leave track on them. Like seeds on a road on which people walk and trample, they do not understand anything of the word of God because of the influence of the evil.

Then, we have the listeners who have a heart like the rocky ground. These are people who listen to the word of God with enthusiasm and excitement, but it does not last too long. They lack depth in their commitment. So, with the frenzy that have they welcomed joyfully the word of God, so quickly do they drop it with the same speed. With them nothing lasts forever. Everything is a matter of a moment and of excitement; nothing of stability, durability and depth.

The heart of some listeners is like a thorny field. Like the seeds that are choked by the thorns of the field on which they are planted, these people are so worried with the problems of the world that God does not play any particular role in their lives. Their many preoccupations and anxieties torment them like thorns that choke the seed.

The heart of some other listeners is like a rich and fertile soil. Like the seeds planted in a good soil, they are open to the reality of God and his kingdom. They are perseverant

and capable of producing spiritual fruits. They know what God expects from them and they strive to put into practice what they hear in the word of God.

As such, this parable teaches us something about the word of God and our attitude with regard to it. In fact, the different fields on which the seeds fall represent different situations the word of God is confronted with on a daily basis. Sometimes we have the impression that we have worked so hard in proclaiming the word, but with little result. At other times, in spite of all our efforts, people do not respond to the word of God as we would wish.

When things happen as described, it is very easy to be discouraged and to despair. And yet, that should not be our attitude, because even if there are seeds that fall on bad land, some fall on good soil. That is why another point the parable teaches us is hope and trust in the future of the work of the Lord. We will never work in vain; rather one day what we do will bear fruits.

This is true not only for the work of the Lord, but even for the education of our children, their schools or marriage, etc. In other words, even if it appears clear now that we have failed in our job as parents or grandparents, teachers or catechists, there is always a chance that even a small portion of our work may succeed. What is needed, however, is courage, patience and hard work in the hope of a blessed harvest at the appropriate time.

Nevertheless, courage, patience and hard work are always demanding, but they are a condition of success. There is no success without hard work. But all that is nothing compared to the glory we are waiting for at the end of this pilgrimage. Moreover, to suffer in this world is as normal as is the process of working. What gives us the courage, however, is the assurance that in the end, we will be set free by God who sets everything free, including the natural world. Now, we and the whole creation are waiting to participate in the redemption to come.

We pray, then, that God gives us an attentive ear to listen to his word and put it into practice in our lives for an abundant harvest. We also ask him to help us change our behavior so that we become, not a rocky or thorny ground, but a good soil on which his word can fall and bear fruit. Finally, we ask him the grace of conversion so that we turn away from sin and everything that is opposed to him and become good soil. May God bless you all!

Isaiah 55, 10-11; Romans 8, 18-23; Matthew 13, 1-23



Homily Date: July 10, 2011

© 2011 – Fr Felicien I. Mbala, PhD, STD

Contact: www.mbala.org

Document Name: 20110710homily.pdf