

Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time A/2020

The readings of this Sunday talk about the power of the word of God. They show us how the word of God is efficient and capable of accomplishing what it is intended for. They invite us to welcome it in our life, to assimilate it and to live by it.

The first reading of Isaiah describes God's promise to the people of Israel. It compares the efficiency of God's promise to the efficacy of the rain and the snow that cannot fall without watering the earth. It highlights in particular the importance of the word that God pronounces, which achieves the end for which it is sent.

What is behind this text is the idea that God is faithful to his people in fulfilling his promise to them. There is also the idea that when God speaks, his word fulfils what it says.

This text allows us to understand the point of today's Gospel as Jesus speaks of the parable of the sower. First of all, Jesus compares the outcome of the word of God to the result that comes out when a sower plants the seeds in a field. He, then, portrays four situations relative to the field on which the seeds are planted, namely the path, the rocky ground, the thorns and the rich soil.

As an illustration, Jesus shows how the seeds fallen on the path can be eaten by the birds, those on the rock can wither for lack of root, those among thorns can be choked, while those fallen on good soil can produce fruits.

Then, in order to respond to the question raised by his disciples why he speaks in parables to the Jews, Jesus explains that he does so that the Scriptures might be fulfilled, because of the inconsistency of their life.

The Gospel finishes with Jesus' explanation of the parable as it illustrates the dispositions of the heart of those who listen to the word of God.

What do we learn from this Gospel? Today I want to talk about the growth of the word of God in us and its obstacles. First of all, let me start with an assertion on the power of the human word. Human word is powerful, efficient and meaning what it says.

For instance, when someone tells another person, "I love you", we realize that person feels good. However, when someone tells another person "I hate you", that one feels bad or even is afraid. The positive or negative feeling that the pronounced words generate in person is an indication that the human word is a channel of energy that can build or destroy, that can do good or bad to a person.

In the same way, but with a high intensity of truth, the word of God is powerful and efficient. It means what it says, because nothing is impossible to God. Moreover, while the efficiency of the human word is limited to the circumstance of time and space, God's word is efficient in all the circumstances and in its entire pronouncement. We see that truth affirmed in the first reading as the prophet of Isaiah compares the word of God to the rain that can never fall without watering the earth.

Though the word of God is efficient, its growth, however, depends on the disposition of the heart of the one who welcomes it. In that perspective, the disposition of the heart plays a big role in what the word can become in the life of someone. That is what today's Gospel is all about. The dispositions of heart of the listeners are symbolized in the parable by the path, the rocky ground, the thorns and the rich soil. In that sense, we have four types of people corresponding to the quality of soil on which the seeds fall in.

First, we have the listeners whose heart is like a road surface. These are people in whom the word has no chance of gaining entry than the seed has no chance of developing on a path that people trample constantly. The main reason that explains such an attitude, Jesus says, is the power of evil that steals away that was sown in their heart.

The second group is that of listeners whose heart is like a rocky ground. These are enthusiastic people who are ready to embrace any new idea coming their way. They live by the fashion and the mode. They drop things as quickly as they take them. They are enthusiastic for everything and nothing, but never have they lasted in what they choose. They are ready to start, but never finish what they have embraced. Jesus says that such an attitude is due to the lack of root.

The third group is that of listeners whose heart is worried for all sort of the problems of the world. They are so busy and preoccupied with so many things that they do not give priority to the things of God. Their multiple preoccupations torment them like thorns that choke the seed to develop normally.

The last group is that of listeners whose heart is like a fertile soil. Like the good ground, they are open to the word of God as they listen to it, and act upon it. Such people understand what the Lord expects from them and strive to please him. Only those who do an effort to welcome the word of the Lord, to keep it and put it into practice are able to produce fruits.

The dispositions of the heart refer, first, to different categories of people and the way they receive the word of God. The important questions to ask here is: To which category of people do you belong? Second, the dispositions of the heart refer to the singularity of human heart in the sense that in each one of us we can find a road surface, thorns and rocky ground. That raises the question of the conversion of heart. The question here is: What can you do in order to be a good soil on which the word of God grows. This is an urgent task we should not delay.

When we examine attentively this parable, it is clear that it teaches us optimism and hope. How? Well, if there is the prospect of the word falling on rocky ground or thorns, there is also the possibility of the word falling of good soil. In other words, whatever might be the difficulties the word of God can encounter in the world, in the end it will always bear fruit because God does not sow in vain.

The same is true with human beings. We should never despair of any one. We have always to remember that whatever might be his failure or mistake, there is always a chance that even a small portion of our work done for him may succeed, even at door's death. What are needed are courage and patience in the hope of a blessed harvest at the appropriate time.

Let us pray that God may give us an attentive ear to listen to his word and put it into practice. Let us also ask him to help us change our conduct so that we become, not rocky or thorny ground, but good soil on which his word can fall and bear fruit. Let us, finally, ask him the grace of conversion so that we turn away from sin and everything that is opposed to him and prevents his word from growing in us. May God bless you all!

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



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