

15th Sunday in Ordinary Time, 12 July 2020

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

Homily: Fr. Ken

In the second half of the relatively brief first reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah, he proclaims the following: "So shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; my word shall not return to me void, but shall do my will, achieving the end for which I sent it".

After the re-reading of that passage, some might ask for a clarification of its meaning. What was the reason, that is, what was "the end" that God was expecting after sending his word upon the earth?

On the surface, it could possibly be argued that it simply was the proclamation of God's love: the prophet spoke the "words" that God had given him. At the same time, it is more likely that there is a deeper meaning, a meaning that cannot be fully understood until the arrival of Jesus, the "Word made flesh".

Isaiah compares God's word to the rain and snow that nourish the earth and bring life. In the Book of Genesis it states: "In the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens, when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up—for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth..." (2:3) The rain and snow make the earth "fertile and fruitful", providing what is needed to sustain life. Just so, the word of God is given in order to provide and sustain spiritual life.

For anyone who has never experienced the planting, growing, and the harvesting of fruit and vegetables, it may be difficult to understand the message of the scripture readings. Just as it may be difficult to understand the depth of the message from the

passages surrounding the story of the Good Shepherd if one has never experienced pastures and flocks of sheep.

It is difficult if not impossible to plant a garden or a field without preparing the ground. One cannot go out and simply scatter seed on the ground that has not been cultivated in some way and expect an abundant harvest.

In the Gospel, Jesus used two images to illustrate his point. One story is about the seeds and the other story is about the ground onto which the seeds are scattered. As he tells the parable, Jesus draws the crowd into something familiar while at the same time giving them a reason to go home pondering the message.

Once the explanation is given to the Apostles by Jesus, the use of the images in the parable comes into focus. The word, the message of salvation, is given to us. What we do with it is another matter. If we allow the cares and troubles of the world to overshadow the message, it does not take root in our lives. If, on the other hand, we allow the "word" to find a place in our hearts and lives, it produces an abundant harvest: it fills us and continually renews itself.

Through the gift of the Spirit and the conversion of hearts, Jesus comes to establish the "Kingdom of God", so that a new manner of social life is made possible: in justice, in fellowship, in solidarity, and in sharing. The "Kingdom" inaugurated by Christ perfects the original goodness of the created order and of human activity, which were compromised by sin. Freed from evil and being placed once more in communion with God, we are able to continue the work of Jesus, with the help of his Spirit. In this, we are called to bring justice to the poor, releasing the oppressed, consoling the afflicted, actively seeking a new social order in which adequate solutions to material poverty are offered, and in which the forces thwarting the attempts of the weakest to free themselves from conditions of misery and slavery are more effectively controlled. When this happens, the "Kingdom of God"

is already present on this earth, although it is not of the earth. It is in this "Kingdom" that the promises of the Prophets find final fulfillment.

Although Jesus gives no more details about the "good soil", it is safe to imagine that it is ground that has been prepared and even after the seeds were planted, the ground was tended. Here the first reading from the Prophet Isaiah is recalled: "Just as from the heavens the rain and snow come down and do not return there till they have watered the earth, making it fertile and fruitful..."

The word of God has been given to us. If we accept it and make it part of our lives, we have the assurance that God will continue to be present and will enable that seed to take root and grow to abundance within us.