



FAITH CIRCLES

WEEKLY SMALL GROUP CATECHESIS

15TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME • YEAR A

SUNDAY GOSPEL

The Soil of our Heart

Matthew 13:1-23

Jesus left the house and sat by the lakeside, but such crowds gathered round him that he got into a boat and sat there. The people all stood on the beach, and he told them many things in parables.

He said, "Imagine a sower going out to sow. As he sowed, some seeds fell on the edge of the path, and the birds came and ate them up. Others fell on patches of rock where they found little soil and sprang up straight away, because there was no depth of earth; but as soon as the sun came up they were scorched and, not having any roots, they withered away. Others fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Others fell on rich soil and produced their crop, some a hundredfold,



some sixty, some thirty. Listen, anyone who has ears!"

Then the disciples went up to him and asked, "Why do you talk to them in parables?" "Because" he replied "the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven are revealed to you, but they are not revealed to them. For anyone who has will be given more, and he will have more than enough; but from anyone who has not, even what he has will be taken away. The reason I talk to them in parables is that they look without seeing and listen without hearing or understanding.

"You, therefore, are to hear the parable of the sower. When anyone hears the word of the kingdom without understanding, the evil one comes and carries off what was sown in his heart: this is the man who received the seed on the edge of the path. The one who received it on patches of rock is the man who hears the word and welcomes it at once with joy. But he has no root in him, he does not last; let some trial come, or some persecution on account of the word, and he falls away at once. The one who received the seed in thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this world and the lure of riches choke the word and so he produces nothing. And the one who received the seed in rich soil is the man who hears the word and understands it; he is the one who yields a harvest and produces now a hundredfold, now sixty, now thirty." ■

GOSPEL REFLECTION

Fr Gerard Moran OCD



The parables are at the very centre of Matthew's Gospel in both its structure and its theme. They expose the "heart of God" as it beats

with love for his creation, bringing it to life, invigorating it, and making it fruitful. Creation "fully alive"

and responding to him is what "the Kingdom" means: God's life pulsing in his creatures.

Jesus, the great surgeon, the Word, has fashioned these surgical instruments, the parables, so that they can also reveal our "hearts" and implant in them the desire for the fulfilment of God's plan. In his loving and dexterous hands, they show the diseases which prevent us from "seeing" and "hearing" what God is asking of us; how we are deaf to God's

appeals, how even if they sometimes register, we lack the perseverance necessary "to carry through" due to the distractions and allurements of the world. He reveals to us the terrible reality of a "fat heart", impervious to the "cry of the poor" who call for our care in family and friend and beyond.

This loving doctor dispenses with "professional distance" and as a friend says to us, "Come, that you might understand with your heart and be converted and healed by me." ■

A WORD FROM POPE FRANCIS



This Sunday's Gospel shows us Jesus preaching on the shore of the Lake of Galilee, and because a large crowd

surrounds him, he climbs into a boat, goes a little away from the shore and preaches from there. When he speaks to the people, Jesus uses many parables: in language understandable to everyone, with images from nature and from everyday situations.

The first story he tells is an introduction to all the parables: that of the sower, who sows his seed unsparingly on every type of soil. And the real protagonist of this parable is actually the seed, which produces more or less

according to the type of soil upon which it falls. The first three areas are unproductive: along the path the seed is eaten by birds; on rocky ground the sprouts are scorched and wither away because they have no roots; among the briars the seed is choked by thorns. The fourth piece of ground is good soil, and only there does the seed take root and bear fruit.

This parable speaks to each of us today, as it spoke to those who listened to Jesus 2,000 years ago. It reminds us that we are the soil where the Lord tirelessly sows the seed of his Word and of his love. How do we receive it? And we can ask ourselves: how is our heart? Which soil does it resemble: that of the path, the rocks, the thorns? It's up to us to become good soil with neither thorns nor

stones, but tilled and cultivated with care, so it may bear good fruit for us and for our brothers and sisters.

And it will do us good not to forget that we too are sowers. God sows good seed, and here too we can also ask ourselves: which type of seed comes out of our heart and our mouth? Our words can do much good and also much harm; they can heal and they can wound; they can encourage and they can dishearten. Remember: what counts is not what goes in but what comes out of the mouth and of the heart. ■

TALKING POINTS

1. Fr Gerard Moran describes beautifully how Jesus uses parables to expose the "heart of God" but also how Jesus uses them like surgical instruments, to reveal to us our own "hearts". What is the soil of your heart like at the moment? What is it in need of from the gardener?
2. Pope Francis reminds us this week that we are both soil, but also sowers of seed. How do I – through my words and actions – sow the basic gospel amongst those God has placed in my life as an agent of joy, hope and love? How might I be a better sower, participating more fully in the evangelising mission of the Church to make Jesus known and loved?

PRAYER POINTS

Pray for Each Other: Ask about and pray for the needs of the group members. Individuals might pray for themselves or ask someone else to pray for them

Response: *Lord may our hearts be good soil, tilled by your word, and our mouths a source of seed, bearing life and drawing others into your loving embrace.*

Reflect: Pope Francis this week reminds us that we are both soil and sowers in the things that come from our hearts and out of our mouths. When do I find it easiest to be a good sower? What are the times when the seed I sow does not draw others into a life with Jesus because my words and heart is not joyful, truthful or encouraging?

Closing Prayer: Lord, your word is life. By your Spirit, remove the rocks and thorns that invade my life, those things that I might even ignore, so that I might be good soil, used for your purpose.

