

GOSPEL*Matthew 13:1-9*

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. So in their case this prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled:

You will listen and listen again, but not understand,
see and see again, but not perceive.

For the heart of this nation has grown coarse,
their ears are dull of hearing,
and they have shut their eyes,
for fear they should see with their eyes,
hear with their ears,
understand with their heart,
and be converted
and be healed by me.

'But happy are your eyes because they see, your ears because they hear! I tell you solemnly, many prophets and holy men longed to see what you see, and never saw it; to hear what you hear, and never heard it.

'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.'

A REFLECTION OF POPE BENEDICT XVI*10 July 2011, Excerpt*

In this Sunday's Gospel (Mt 13:1-23), Jesus recounts to the crowd the well-known Parable of the Sower. In a certain way it is an "autobiographical" passage, for it reflects the very experience of Jesus, of his preaching. He identifies himself with the sower who scatters the good seed of the Word of God and notes the different effects it obtains, in accordance with the way in which people hear the proclamation.

Some listen superficially to the Word but do not take it in; others accept it at the time but are unable to persevere and lose it all; there are those who are engrossed by worldly concerns and enticements; and those who listen receptively, like the good soil: here the word bears an abundance of fruit.

However this Gospel also puts the accent on Jesus' preaching "method", that is, on his use of parables. "Why do you speak to them in parables?", his disciples ask (Mt 13:10). And Jesus answers distinguishing between them and the crowd: to his disciples — namely to those who have already decided for him — he can speak openly about the Kingdom of God, to others, instead, he must proclaim it in parables, precisely to encourage their decision, conversion of the heart; indeed, by their very nature parables demand the effort of interpretation, they not only challenge the mind but also freedom. St John Chrysostom explained: "And this he [Jesus] says to draw them unto him, and to provoke them and to signify that if they would convert he would heal them" (cf. Homily on the Gospel of Matthew, 45, 1-2).

Basically, God's true "Parable" is Jesus himself, his Person who, in the sign of humanity, hides and at the same time reveals his divinity. In this manner God does not force us to believe in him but attracts us to him with the truth and goodness of his incarnate Son: love, in fact, always respects freedom.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What stood out to you from the Gospel or Reflection/ Homily?



Head: Jesus says that some people hear the Word but it never takes root, while others bear abundant fruit. Looking at the different soils in the parable, which one most resembles your relationship with God at this stage of your life?



Heart: Jesus says that people can look without seeing and listen without understanding. Where might God be trying to get your attention right now, and what could be preventing you from truly hearing him?



Hands: Pope Benedict says that God does not force us but attracts us. What is one invitation from God that you sense you need to respond to more deliberately this week?

PRAYER

Spend some time in prayer with one another:

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. "Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray")
3. Offer prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others' prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps praying the 'Glory Be'.