

Homily for 15th Sunday Ordinary Time

July 11-12, 2020

Heart Check-Up

St Teresa of Calcutta, India died as a world-known figure. But who would have ever thought she would have attained such influence when she first began? What did she have to recommend her? A tiny woman, she began with the most meager of resources. Mother Teresa told her superiors, “I have three pennies and a dream from God to build an orphanage.” “Mother Teresa,” her superiors said, “you can’t build an orphanage with three pennies . . . with three pennies you can’t do anything.” “I know,” she said, smiling, “but with God and three pennies I can do anything.” St Mother Teresa understood the principle of the seed. It takes very little -- but very little blessed by God -- and miracles can occur.

This story of one of the Church’s most recently canonized women, (St. Teresa was declared a saint along with St John Paul II in 2014) expresses something that is the principle at the heart of today’s readings. When we cooperate with the grace of Jesus, we will grow in seeing the beauty and interconnectedness of all life, and thereby live fruitfully and meaningfully.

Isaiah saw this spiritual principle as he wrote a poetic analogy:

*For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven,
and do not return there until they have watered the earth,
making it bring forth and sprout,
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,
¹¹ so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;
it shall not return to me empty,
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,
and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.¹*

St Teresa understood this principle - that just as there are laws of agriculture allowing for the land to be fruitful, so too there are laws of spiritual growth resulting in the flourishing of our relationship with Jesus, so that we can be used by him in the service of His Kingdom.

But here is the critical point to make: There are spiritual laws that will either hinder or aid the spiritual growth that Jesus’ teaches in today’s parable.

Notice what Jesus is doing here in the parable. He is appealing to our senses of sight and hearing, stating that we can so live the years of our life without perceiving the presence of God. So many of his contemporaries missed who he was and the importance of his kingdom entirely.

¹ [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*](#). (1993). (Is 55:10–11). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

He describes this as a problem of the heart that has grown dull and far from him. And so today I want to invite you to join me in doing a heart checkup by asking ourselves: “What about my heart? How am I responding to Jesus? Or to put it in relation to the parable, to ask the question this way:

Is my heart:

1. *A Hardened Heart*
2. *A Defeated Heart*
3. *A Distracted Heart*
4. *A Trusting and Hopeful heart*

In the Parable of the Sower Jesus presents to us a careless sower who is allowing his seed to fall everywhere. There is seed on the pathway, seed in shallow soil, seed sown with thorns and then the seed placed in the rich soil. Wouldn't a smart agriculturalist keep his seed for only the good soil? And if you had hired such a person to care for your gardens, wouldn't you say “hey buddy smarten up, stop being so careless with my seed?”

Ah but here is the point, this is not a careless farmer, he is a generous farmer sowing the seeds of grace wherever he can! For we know that the sower is Jesus - whose grace is offered -but so often not received because of the state of the heart.

First there is the hardened heart:

And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up... When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path.²

The hardened heart is best understood as ground that cannot receive the seed because it will not receive the word. In our climate, the hardened heart is like January soil, it is frozen solid and can't receive the seeds of the Word. This is the person who has become so embittered towards Jesus and the Church or has rejected outright a consideration of the Gospel that it is rejected and they do not desire to understand it. The devil does his work to by snatching the word away and no seed is left

Then there is the defeated heart.

Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. ⁶ But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away... As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; ²¹ yet such a person has no

² [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*](#). (1993). (Mt 13:19). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away.³

Jesus understands that in this life we do face tribulation, real troubles- and persecution from those who are antagonistic towards us as disciples of Jesus. How do some respond to such challenges? They are defeated. It is one thing to for a season to follow the way of Christ, but to follow him for a life time, will require facing those times when the heart feels defeated with the encouragement of those who can support us to persevere.

Next there is the distracted heart:

Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them... As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing.

I would like to suggest that in our day this is the heart disease most prevalent, the distracted heart. How easily we can be lured into thinking that this world's offerings are all that matter and find ourselves distracted by such a preoccupation with this physical world that we disregard the world of the Spirit – the world of the interior life.

Then lastly there is the trusting and hopeful heart:

Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. ⁹ Let anyone with ears listen... ²³ But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.⁴

Do you hear what Jesus says about this heart? It is the heart that both hears and understands the word. When we live this way, we choose to give our lives to seeing who we are in relation to who Jesus is. In more fully understanding him, we more fully understand ourselves and discover that indeed God's word does not return to him empty but accomplishes that for which he sent it.

Think about the harvest produced by the trusting and hopeful heart of St Mother Teresa. May we be inspired by her example and Jesus' teaching to examine our hearts and pray:

Jesus help me to cultivate and trusting and hopeful heart so that like St Mother Teresa I can be used by you in the service of your Kingdom.

³ [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*](#). (1993). (Mt 13:20–21). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

⁴ [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*](#). (1993). (Mt 13:23). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.