

15th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

St. Matthew 13:1-23

The parable in this Gospel is often referred to as the “Parable of the Sower,” but in fact it has very little to do with the sower—it is concerned with the ground on which the seeds fall.

Gossip is a personal failure. Not so much spreading rumours or prying into the lives of others but, rather, speaking unkindly or unfairly of others; criticising others because we do not like what they say or we don’t like what they do or even simply because they annoy us. In our better moments we commit ourselves to not speaking ill of others, but then we make that promise when we are alone and it is quite easy to keep a promise not to gossip when there is no one about with whom to gossip.

We all know very well that gossip is wrong. On the one hand we want to say that we had all the good intentions in the world to better ourselves but then we are weak and these things happen. On the other hand we know we must accuse ourselves of sin—of hurting others, of hurting ourselves, of hurting God.

The major theme of this parable is the acceptance or rejection of Our Lord’s teachings. Whilst Our Lord’s mercy is abundant, He does not allow us to falsely justify our sins. When we commit ourselves to not gossiping we accept Our Lord’s teaching of the Kingdom of Heaven. When we gossip we fall into sin because of our weakness but Our Lord holds out His hand, in the Sacrament of Penance, to lift us up. When we justify our sin we reject Our Lord and His teaching. When we commit ourselves to not do this or that, like gossip, then the word of God has fallen on good soil that can bring forth fruit. When we justify our sins then the seed has fallen on rocky ground or fallen among the thorns. When we admit that we have failed and seek forgiveness and want to do better then the sower returns and re-plants the seed.

We might ask why does God, the sower, plant seeds on rocky ground or among thorns rather than planting them all in good soil where there will be a guaranteed harvest? That is because God does not limit His love but offers His promise of life to all people. He takes the risk that His love will be rejected. He makes Himself vulnerable, just as He does every day in the Mass when He makes himself present totally—Body and Blood, soul and divinity—in the Eucharist which we receive in Holy Communion. If we take Holy Communion—that is the Body and Blood, soul and divinity of Jesus Christ—with every intention of loving Him in return, then the seed that is Christ takes root in us, finding good soil, and will produce an abundant harvest. If we take Holy Communion without any real regard for what or who it is I am receiving—if we take Holy Communion with our mind on other things and without believing that it is truly God that we receive—then it falls on rocky ground and among thorns and will be burned away by the heat of our disregard or the thorns of our disbelief or boredom.

We know that if the Word of God is to find good soil we need the grace of the Holy Spirit and the grace of the Sacrament of Penance to nurture that soil. It means removing ourselves from any occasion that could give rise to sin, such as reading gossip magazines or newspapers, or watching gossip television—all of which is intended to do nothing but make us feel good by making others feel bad. That means we have to take the risk and make ourselves vulnerable knowing that if we do not join in the gossip of others or, even better, turn around gossip by speaking of the good in other people, that we could be mocked or feel isolated and lonely. But, then, so much worth doing is not easy, but that is what makes it worthwhile.