

Fr. Nick Dant's Homily, Saint Matthew Catholic Church, Indianapolis
Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, July 11-12, 2020, Cycle A

Our Gospel parable from Matthew this weekend tries to grapple with the effectiveness of God's Word and the receptivity given to God's Word in the world. Given the suffering we have been enduring with the coronavirus and COVID-19, we can legitimately wonder just how effective is God's Word? In the Old Testament Book of the Prophet Isaiah, God says: just as the rain and snow come down and make the world fruitful, "so shall my word be, that goes forth from my mouth; my world shall not return to me void, but shall do my will ..." Really? There seems to be an awful lot of suffering and death lately.

However, maybe the calamity we are experiencing is not so much that God's Word itself is ineffective. Maybe something else is at play here. Matthew's parable of the sower and the seed does seem to make clear that if God's Word does not always seem to bear fruit, it is not because God's word is defective. God's Word is itself good. No matter what the yield, God's Word is able to take hold in some way; eventually bearing fruit of a hundred, sixty, or thirtyfold. God's Word being effective in the world, though depends on the richness of the soil that nourishes the seed. In other words, just like the farmer who plants his seeds, whether those seeds will grow and bear forth a yield for the harvest, depends on the quality of soil that surrounds the seed.

In this parable of the sower and his seed, we usually think of God's Word being the seed that the sower, Jesus, plants into the soil. We usually picture ourselves as the soil who receives the seed of God's Words. Whether that seeds produces fruit depends on whether we are good or bad soil.

But listen carefully to what Jesus says in this Gospel story. He begins his interpretation of his parable by saying "The seed sown on the path is the one who hears the word of the Kingdom without understanding it." The seeds are the disciples Jesus sows into the field of the world – The Baptized!

Whether we, the seeds, bear fruit depends on the kind of environment we are surrounded with. In other words, with what kind of soil are we nourishing ourselves with as Jesus' disciples?

Jesus, the sower, showers the Word of God among us freely and unconditionally, just as the rains cover the fields. The fruitfulness of the Word Jesus spreads among us depends upon the receptivity of those who hear the Word of God. The question is what kind of soil am I living in?? God's Word is ever profound, ever present and ever relevant, but God's Word does not force or coerce. Human Freedom – what soil we nourish ourselves with – allows us to refuse to listen to God's Word, to ignore God's Word, and even to twist the meaning of God's Word for our own selfish ends and reject that Word.

So, what kind of soil are you surrounding yourselves with? Am I living amongst the footpaths and rocky soils of life, where the Word of God cannot take root, because I lack depth of any kind? Or, do I live in an environment of lots of thorns and thistles – the thorns and thistles Jesus talks about, where wealth, possessions and material comfort are more important to me – so much so, that my concern for the things of the world chokes God's Word off? Or I am that one (seed) who surrounds myself with the rich soil that will allow God's Word to be effective in me, so that I bear fruit making God's Word effective in the world? This is the soil of a rich prayer life, reading the scriptures, celebrating the sacraments, especially, the Eucharist, so I can yield a growth of hundred, or sixty or thirtyfold for God's Kingdom.