

**ECHOING GOD'S WORD
IN THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY
JULY 12, 2026
FIFTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME**

SCRIPTURES:

Isaiah 55:10-11	God's word holds power and effectiveness.
Romans 8:18-23	God will turn our struggles and pain into glory.
Matthew 13:1-23	God's word will bear fruit if we welcome it.

SCRIPTURE BACKGROUND:

Matthew:

The Catholic Church, through the agency of the Pontifical Biblical Commission in Rome, accepts that there were at least three stages in the formation of the Gospel texts: (1) What Jesus actually said and did; (2) How this was articulated in the preaching and teaching of the first generation of the Church; (3) What was eventually written down for the benefit of the various communities at the end of the first century and beginning of the second.

This parable probably went through the same three-stage development. (1) Jesus must have spoken the very first part, about the generosity with which God sows his word in whatever kind of soil. And how this word will produce its results no matter what! (2) We are not too clear as to how the first teachers of the faith reported this parable in their oral rendition of Jesus' teaching. They had perhaps already begun to develop it in its applications to the receptivity or non-receptivity of the hearers. (3) Surely, by the time Mark (circa 60s CE), and Luke & Matthew (circa 80s CE), came to write their versions of the parable, the emphasis had really shifted to the mode and quality of hearing the Gospel rather than to the inevitable effectiveness of the word of God.

Jesus knew how to address people with an agricultural background. They knew all about the practices of sowing and plowing and of the growth of the seed. Unlike farmers of today, those in ancient Palestine sowed seed everywhere first, giving no heed to footpaths or to rocky ground. After having sowed, they then plowed, hoping that good soil would be found everywhere, no matter what the previous condition of the soil had been! Jesus seems to have meant that God is both the sower of the seed and the plower of the fields. No wonder there is sure to be a harvest, with little consideration given to the original condition of the soil. But when Mark, Matthew, and Luke get hold of this material, the problem of human receptivity has begun to happen. Some in their communities are not very receptive to the word of salvation. So, they shift the emphasis to those who hear rather than to the inherent power of the seed as Jesus must have intended it. The parable becomes a call to a proper response on the part of the Christian community. Already, some have not been able to survive the persecutions and the opposition.

In the Bible, we do not find the later distinctions made between the will of God and the freedom of those who hear God's word. It appears as if God wills their rejection of the good news. The community later developed its understanding of human freedom to choose.

Isaiah:

The Second Isaiah (Chapters 40-55) was addressed to a people still in the Exile of Babylon. God addresses to them a word of hope and of restoration. If God says so, they *will be returned* to their land. The *word* of God is equivalent to the *deed* of God. What God says he will do is already as good as done. In the sixth century before the Common Era, this unnamed prophet in the tradition of the great Isaiah of Jerusalem (who lived before the Exile) reassures the people that their repentance has been seen by God the Most High. They are forgiven and will be restored to their homeland. Returning to the land also meant returning to the Lord in obedience and in total self-surrender. God is not powerless. The people know about the power of rainfall. It will produce crops. So will God's word produce a revival of the nation of Israel. When the word of God was spoken in human flesh in Jesus Christ (John 1), he did not return to the Father empty-handed. He brought all the redeemed with him.

Romans:

From last Sunday, through the 18th Sunday of the year, we read from Romans 8, a chapter that has been called by many the most important in the whole Bible. There, Paul lets go with all he has to extol the effects of the power of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the redeemed. Just before today's passage, Paul has been speaking of the meaning of Christ's suffering: his passing to glory. It is the same with the suffering of Jesus' disciples: for us, too, suffering is a path to redemption. Now, he will set the context and perspective for a Christian understanding of human suffering: The sin of Adam pales in comparison with the gift of redemption that it obtained. Christ is the "new Adam" in that he reversed the consequences of the sin of our first parent. The glory that Christ has inaugurated in his suffering will outshine that which was lost through sin.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How effective has the word of God been in your life as a Christian? Have you heard the word of salvation in Christ Jesus spoken to you personally? How has that word come to you? Through family? Through the ministries of the Church? Through the events and occurrences of your life?
2. What obstacles and impediments are there to God's word today in the particular world in which you live? Does opposition come from optional or non-optional sources? (Do you have a choice about those persons or situations by which the word of God is opposed in your life?) What can you do to make the soil of your life more receptive to God's word?
3. Do you hear the word of God effectively proclaimed by the Christian community or parish to which you belong? In what ways does the community facilitate the hearing of the word? In what ways does the community stand in the way of your hearing the word? What can you do to improve the situation?

SUGGESTION FOR CHRISTIAN ACTION

You may want to choose one area that you can make more receptive to the word of God in love and salvation. Bring some optimism and some cheer to a segment of life where there has been pessimism and sorrow. Work with some other person at grooming a small piece of soil for the sake of the kingdom.

PRAYER

*Lord of the Harvest, send workers to join with you in bringing in the yield
which you have sown, nurtured and brought to fruition.
Make me more and more open to the nuances of your word as they apply to me each day.
Let me hear your word in areas of my life where I have not yet heard you speak!*

CATHOLIC PASTORAL PRACTICES

Jesus was sent by the Father to sow the seeds of the kingdom in his ministry on earth. Surely, the sowing did not involve only his verbal teaching. His life, his every act, particularly his dying and rising, became a proclamation of good news for the whole world. In him was the kingdom of God inaugurated. It began to be realized in his being born into this world.

Then, he sent his disciples (and all who would come after them) to continue the sowing of that seed by which the kingdom would come about for the whole universe.

The Church, you and me, are now responsible for the sowing and for the harvesting. What that means is that our families and our parishes are responsible for that work.

The work of evangelization has been assigned to the community of believers who come after Christ. None of us can claim to be exempt from that charge. It is a task laid upon each of us: to make known the good news that Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior of the universe.

Our recent holy fathers have traveled all over the world in the work of evangelizing. They have not ceased ever to proclaim the truth that is in Jesus Christ. They went to confirm the local churches in their ministry of evangelizing. To all the churches has been entrusted the task of sowing the seed of the word of God in all hearts. Pope Francis wanted to re-sow that seed in our hearts and in the hearts of all persons of good will. No soil is unworthy of his zeal and of his energy.

Professional missionaries, clergy, religious and laity, go out to the whole world to announce that Jesus Christ loves all people. Professionals and volunteers in the parishes have all kinds of ways of announcing the good news. Homilies, religious education classes, all faith-formation efforts, youth ministry, outreach to the poor and to the needy, ministries of presence and of compassion: Jesus is made present in the sacred works that come from our witness.

The local parish, the faith-sharing group to which you belong, the family within which you live, all are agents of evangelization, of seed-sowing and of harvesting. Every Christian community needs to be an apostolic community, one that bears the Word to others in some way.

We are never limited by our personal or corporate inadequacies. The word of God will accomplish the purposes for which it was sent. Ours is only to spread it far and wide and to leave the rest to the Lord. There will surely be obstacles to the growth. Pray that we ourselves do not become those obstacles.