

Homily (15th Sunday of Ordinary Time) – 7/16/2017

Listen to this statistic: Next to the Jewish faith, the Catholic faith is the second most ineffective religion in passing on its faith to the next generation. You don't believe it. Look at your own family. Your sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, nephews and nieces, and you will see that this statistic hits home. How does this ineffectiveness happen?

That is what today's gospel seeks to answer. For the early followers of Christ ran into the same exact problem. Some of the early Christians communities were barely able to hang onto their faith. And they brought this question to Jesus and he gives a parable as an answer.

But before hearing Jesus answer, you and I might think "This doesn't apply to me, here I am in church." Well keep in mind the words of a wise man who said: "Going to church no more makes you a Christian than walking into a garage makes you an automobile".

So, Jesus answer in today's gospel applies to all of us. What is his answer to ineffective handing on of faith? His answer falls into three categories: first there is a lack of understanding. Second there is a lack of discipline. And third there is a lack of priorities. He gives these answers by way of a parable. Jesus tells about a sower who goes out to sow seed. Now the sower represents the heavenly Father, the seed is Jesus. And this sower, is extravagant, generous even wasteful, in his sowing.

You know in the time of Jesus seed was a precious value. But here in the parable was this sower hurling it on paths like route 158. No seed is going to take root there. The ground cannot receive it. Same with the word of God. If there is no understanding of God it is hard to receive Jesus and to take root in someone's life. Sometimes it can be helpful to ask someone to imagine their favorite comedian, and explain that this humor is contained hundreds of times in God. Or imagine the most graceful, gifted basketball, baseball, football player and say all that talent is contained thousands of times in God. Or imagine their favorite singer, actress, or most beautiful or handsome human being, or most compassionate person or most intelligent brilliant mind, and all that is contained a million times over in God. The point is that all the beauty, talent and skill and brain

power everything they naturally enjoy and admire is already contained infinitely in God. Without that, understanding their relationship with God might be reduced to rules and laws and a bunch of don'ts. Or they don't understand the teachings of Christ. It would be like taking someone to a baseball game and they did not understand it. They can't enter into it, same with those who do not understand the teachings of Jesus.

Then, the parable tells about the seed that falls on rocky ground with superficial soil. With this group it is all emotion and pep rally feeling. Such as when Pope Francis visited America church attendance went up for a while. Waves of excitement rippled through Catholic church but only for a while. Once the emotion peters out there is no perseverance. You know if we take something seriously in life, we surround it with discipline. Have you noticed that?

Our work, our marriage, our education, our sports all demand discipline and practice. Imagine if you don't feel like going to work, you don't go. You won't last long in that job. Imagine if you wanted to be a marine but you didn't feel like going to boot camp. Imagine you want to sing in the choir but don't feel like practicing. If we worship feelings we won't be too deep in religious faith. If the pleasure pain principle is our god, we will only do something if it feels good and avoid that which stretches our heart.

When we take something seriously we surround it with discipline despite feelings. If the word of God, Jesus, is taken seriously in our lives, we will surround it with discipline. But do we ?

Then the third seed the parable tells about is the seed that fell among the thorns and the thorns grew up and choked it. The lure of riches and anxiety, in other words lesser desires and concerns distracted from the most important priority. A rabbi put it this way: "God is of no importance unless He is of supreme importance."

You know we build our lives around certain areas. Family, friends, home, work, saving money, are very important. But for a follower of Christ they cannot be allowed to be the top priority. They were not for Jesus and we are called to pattern our lives on his life.

Finally, there is the seed that falls on good soil. On this ground there is understanding and discipline and God is the number one priority. And Jesus tells us this soil became fruitful beyond measure. How can we become good soil for the word of God? We can by arranging our lives to give God's word the best possible chance to be effective. How do you do that?

One way is to look on our lives as we would our backyard garden. And in this garden plant a physical reminder to get enough exercise, nutrition and rest. And in this garden also plant a row of social friends and emotional companions to keep you company. And in this garden because flowers are known to have intelligence, plant some time to step aside stimulate your mind and learn. In doing this little spiritual exercise we can partner with God. We can grow God in our lives to give God's word the best possible chance to be effective not only but maybe be effective in passing on the faith.