15TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

THEME: THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER (Matt. 13:1-23) (full text)

Jesus told his disciples in Jn 15:16- It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you and appointed you, to go and bear fruit that will last.

1 Cor 3:6-7, St Paul told the Corinthians, 'I planted, Apollos watered, but God caused the growth. Therefore, neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth'.

Beloved brothers and sisters, today's Gospel focuses on the Parable of the Sower. It challenges us to examine the "soil" of our hearts, tending to it with great care so that God's Word doesn't get choked by distractions, but instead bears abundant fruit in our daily lives.

The Parable of the Sower, as told in the Gospel of Matthew (13:1-23), paints a picture of an unbelievably generous God. The Sower doesn't carefully portion out His seed, measuring it only for the perfect spots. He scatters it wildly, lavishly, and abundantly. His Word is thrown everywhere: onto the hard paths, the rocky ground, among the thorns, and onto the rich soil.

This parable is a massive comfort to us when we feel overwhelmed, like our own efforts to share the faith are failing. Whether it is teaching our children the faith, cracking marriage, working for justice, or trying to live a virtuous life, consistent prayer routine, holiness of life. When we often face disappointment when our efforts don't seem to produce instant positive results. Yet, the parable tells us to keep scattering the seed of love and truth, leaving the results to God's providence. The mustard seed of our efforts will eventually grow to become a great blessing (Matt. 13:32).

The parable of the sower is also a mirror held up to our own spiritual lives. It challenges us to look at exactly what kind of soil we are providing for God's grace and the daily word of God we hear. The parable identifies 4 different ways in which we respond to the seed of the word of God sown in our hearts from birth and baptism till now. It is a chronicle of our faith journey. These soils can identify our current personal relationship with God. Now let's hear them:

1)The Path: This soil represents those whose hearts are sometimes hardened by past disappointments, wounds, or the daily routines of life. If we are there, then we become closed off, and God's Word simply bounces off us without ever taking root.
2)The Rocky Ground: We might receive God's Word with great enthusiasm—perhaps during a retreat or a beautiful Sunday Mass—but lack depth. When the "sun rises" (when trials, hardships, or the opinions of others threaten us), our faith withers because it doesn't have deep roots in personal prayer and perseverance.
3)The Thorns: We hear the Word, but the "thorns" of modern life crowd it out. The anxiety/depressions of our times, the endless pursuit of wealth, and the distractions of everyday life slowly choke God out of our priorities. Political opinions, public and social ideals, internet, social media etc. These are real thorns that stiffen the seed of God's word from bearing fruit.
4)The Rich Soil: This is the heart that allows God's Word to penetrate, taking root and yielding a harvest of thirty, sixty, or a hundredfold. Richard Mc Cullin CM calls this deep-down-things (Ps 42:7- Deep is calling on deep. In the depth, spiritual realities make sense to spiritual people.

The rich soil represents parishioners with deep sense of sacred, consistent prayer lives, kind, charitable to all and just loved by all. So,
How do we cultivate the rich soil? We do it intentionally. Just as a farmer must clear away rocks and uproot thorns, we must practice spiritual "weeding." Weeding might mean putting down our phones to spend quiet time in prayer, letting go of long-held resentments, or setting aside the anxieties that steal our peace.

In today's parable of the sower, the Lord accurately describes the condition of our hearts as individuals, families, communities, and parish.

We hear in the Gospel "For the heart of this people has grown dull; their ears are hard of hearing, and they have shut their eyes, lest they should see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn, and I should heal them." (Matthew 13:15)

The parable challenges us to ask ourselves: What kind of soil is my heart? Has it become hardened, shallow, distracted, or is it fertile enough to receive the seed of God's word?

When our hearts are closed against God, there is no rich soil for the seed of the Kingdom to take root, grow, and bear fruit. Without true repentance or conversion, there can be no healing.

Consequently, the mystery of God's Kingdom in our midst remains dormant or hidden from us because we neither perceive it nor allow it to transform our lives.

The purpose of this parable is neither to condemn us nor to make us complacent. Rather, it is a call for honest self-examination. It invites us to re-examine our hearts and remove whatever hinders God's word from taking root, become more attentive to His voice, and open ourselves to the healing that comes through conversion

As the Prophet Isaiah reminds us in today's first reading (Is. 55:10-11), the Word that goes forth from God’s mouth *shall not* return empty. It will accomplish the purpose for which it was sent. God has sent His Word into our lives. The question we must answer is this: Will we allow it to bear fruit in us?

Perhaps this week, let us ask the Lord to soften the hard edges of our hearts, to deepen our roots in prayer, and to clear out the thorns of worry, modernism, and extreme secularist tendencies in us so that we can become truly fertile ground for His grace.

For our examination of conscience, let us individually ask:

- Which of the **four soil types** (path/roadside , rocks, thorns, rich soil) resonates most with me right now?

We pray that God will grant us a true conversion of heart so that the seed of the word of God will bear abundant fruit in our lives.

Amen!