

Homily of Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A, 2026

Isaiah 55:10-11; Psalm 65:10-14; Romans 8:18-23; Matthew 13:1-9

The first reading is Prophet Isaiah's admonition to the people of Israel to accept the word of God because, not only that it is life-giving, it must surely come to fulfillment. He uses two familiar weather elements, rain and snow, to describe the effects of the word of God. Human beings are the earth watered by the word to make us fertile and fruitful. Without God's word, human beings become wastelands. May we have the same experience like Jeremiah who exclaimed, "When I found your words, I devoured them; your words were my joy, the happiness of my heart" (Jeremiah 15:16), and the psalmist, "Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light for my path" (Psalm 119:105).

In the second reading, St. Paul describes creation's suffering, pain, and futility until the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ, came and set creation free from slavery to corruption in order to share in the glorious freedom of the children of God. Slavery to corruption means to be controlled by moral decay, sin, and destructive habits. The Word made flesh, Jesus Christ, sets free individuals, peoples, groups, communities, organizations, churches, states, countries, and so on, when they listen to the Word and accept it.

In the gospel, Jesus gives us the Parable of the Sower and, also, its meaning: The word of God is the seed, and we are either the path, or the rocky ground, or among thorns, or the rich soil where the word falls on or where the word is sown. We pray not to be the path, or the rocky ground, or among thorns. We pray to be the rich soil so that we can bear lasting fruit, "a hundred, or sixty or thirty."

We are not to be like the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and their scribes who nullify the word of God in favor of human traditions. All human-made laws, rules, and regulations are limited and, at some point, become obsolete. But the word of God is limitless and everlasting. Jesus says, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away" (Matthew 24:35).

One of the conversion moments of St. Augustine of Hippo was when he was weeping and agonizing over his spiritual struggles in a garden in Milan. Then, he heard a voice that chanted repeatedly from a nearby house, "Tolle, lege" (Latin for "Pick it up and read, pick it up and read"). He picked up the Bible, opened it at random and read the first passage his eyes fell upon, Romans 13:13-14, "Let us conduct ourselves properly as in the day, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in promiscuity and licentiousness, not in rivalry and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the desires of the flesh." After reading this passage, St. Augustine experienced a flood of light that cleared his lingering doubts. There and then, he took an immediate decision to fully commit to the Christian faith.

The same voice sings to us today, "Pick it up your Bible and read, pick it up your Bible and read." St. Jerome tells us that ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ.

A friend of my shared with me where he belongs in Jesus' Parable of the Sower. He said that he does not belong among those who fell on the path because he is steady with his faith and goes to Mass. For the same reason, he does not see himself as among those who fell on rocky ground. He says that he sees himself among those who fell on rich soil but there are thorns all over the rich soil. How not to be choked by the thorns is the problem.

Many of us can identify with my friend's situation. Daily in our way are thorns of trials and temptations, and thorns of evil one's machinations. Thorns, spiritual or physical, are part of life. Jesus says, "I have told you this so that you might have peace in me. In the world you will have trouble, but take courage, I have conquered the world" (John 16:33). In John 17:15, Jesus does not pray that God takes us out from the world. He prays that God keeps us from the evil one.

We are encouraged, today, to let the word of God dwell richly in us and rule our lives (Colossians 3:16). With God's word, we are conquerors. With the word of God, we dwell in the shelter of the Most High (Psalm 91:1). "Even though [we] walk through the valley of the shadow of death, [we] will fear no evil, for you are with [us]; your rod and your staff comfort [us]" (Psalm 23:4). Amen.

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