

Read

Isaiah 55:10-11

Psalm 65:10, 11,
12-13, 14

Romans 8:18-23

Matthew 13:1-23 or 13:1-9



REFLECTION

These days, we expect a good return for our investment in everything, from planting to giving money to charities and nonprofits. We want to know that every bit of our seed money is making a practical difference. It can be hard to accept how little control we actually have over what happens to the time, money, and energy we put out into the world. Even the most modern, tech-savvy farmer knows that weather, animal predation, and soil conditions don't always cooperate to bring about a good crop.

In this case, it is Jesus whose ability to control outcomes is limited. He tells his disciples that some who hear him will close their eyes and ears rather than be converted. God values our freedom so much that he allows his salvific acts that work in our lives to be limited by our acceptance. God can plant the seed and water it, but it is up to us to dig the rocks and thorns out of the fields of our hearts. God's word can bring healing and growth to our lives. Do we have ears to hear?

? QUESTIONS

- ❖ What do today's readings teach you about the Christian life?
- ❖ Is your heart hard? What are some of the rocks and thorns that keep you from receiving God's word and persevering in living it out?
- ❖ Have you ever planted anything? Does that practical experience make this parable feel more accessible to you?

Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

July 16, 2023

⚡ ACTION

Sometimes we are tempted to save our kindness and generosity for the people who will repay it with kindness in return. In contrast, the sower in the parable spreads his seeds far and wide, knowing that the fruit of the harvest will contain the seeds for many more plantings. As you go into your community this week, make a special effort to bring Christ's love to as many people as you can, whether they look like rich or rocky soil. Your seeds might find fertile ground in unexpected places.



Check out Jean-François Millet's painting, *The Sower*:
<https://collections.mfa.org/objects/31601>



July 16, 2023

FIFTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

LECTIONARY #103A

Isaiah 55:10-11

Psalms 65:10, 11, 12-13, 14

Romans 8:18-23

Matthew 13:1-23 or 13:1-9

Prepare for the Word

The following elements may be used by the catechist, teacher, or youth minister to prepare to facilitate today's session with teens. You may integrate this information into the reflection and discussion on today's readings.

Leader's Context

Today's Gospel is a parable about a sower. It is the first in several parables found in Matthew, chapter 13, many of which will be read over the next several Sundays. In addition to unpacking the meaning and message of this passage, in today's reflection it will be important to explain what a parable is and how they illustrate truth by making a comparison to everyday life. Our struggle, as contemporary readers, is that we often don't relate to the specific example Jesus uses, which necessitates some explanation and contextualization. In this parable, God is the sower, the seeds are his Word, and the soil represents our receptivity and response. As we learn about God through parables, we are also challenged to see ourselves in the story and consider God's call to us.

Q FOCUS: *The parable of the sower prompts us to examine our response to God's Word.*

Liturgical Calendar Connection

July 22 is the feast day of St. Mary Magdalene, apostle to the apostles. In biblical times the witness of a woman was not admissible in court, yet all four Gospel accounts credit Mary Magdalene among the first witnesses to the Resurrection. Scripture tells us that Jesus had healed Mary, driving seven demons out of her, and her discipleship is so profound that she is named among those who had the courage to stand at the foot of the cross at the crucifixion. Although some assume that Mary was the unnamed

sinful woman who washed Jesus' feet with her tears or the woman caught in adultery, there is actually no evidence from Scripture nor any in early Church tradition to support this. Rather, we celebrate and affirm that she was the one whom the Lord sent to proclaim the resurrection to the twelve apostles.

Church Teaching Connection

"There are regions of the world that are still awaiting a first evangelization; others that have received it, but need a deeper intervention; yet others in which the Gospel put down roots a long time ago, giving rise to a true Christian tradition but in which, in recent centuries with complex dynamics the secularization process has produced a serious crisis of the meaning of the Christian faith and of belonging to the Church" (Pope Benedict XVI, Homily, June 28, 2010).

Hear the Word

Use this resource, a Lectionary, or a Bible to proclaim the reading. The book should be held reverently or placed on a lectern. If possible, light a candle that is placed near where the Gospel will be proclaimed. Gesture for teens to stand.

Gospel Acclamation

Use the same musical setting that is used in your parish or at school Masses. Teens may help with music and proclaim the Gospel.

Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Matthew 13:1-9

Reader: A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew.

All: Glory to you, O Lord.

All make the Sign of the Cross on their forehead, lips, and heart.

On that day, Jesus went out of the house and sat down by the sea. Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat down, and the whole crowd stood along the shore. And he spoke to them at length in parables, saying: "A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path,

and birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky ground, where it had little soil. It sprang up at once because the soil was not deep, and when the sun rose it was scorched, and it withered for lack of roots. Some seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it. But some seed fell on rich soil and produced fruit, a hundred or sixty or thirtyfold. Whoever has ears ought to hear.”

Reader: The Gospel of the Lord.

All: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Everyone may be seated.

Reflect on the Word

When beginning the reflection and discussion about today's readings, first refer to the handout for today. Ask teens what they learned about themselves and about Christian discipleship from performing the action for the week and journaling. Ask teens about the readings of the day: What struck them? What do they think the readings mean? How do the readings affect their own lives? Then begin the following reflection:

With today's Gospel, Jesus begins to teach the crowds in a series of parables, which we will continue to hear for the next two Sundays. These parables use similes and metaphor to illustrate truth by making comparisons to real-life experiences. Some are expressed as short sayings, others are delivered as a story. Jesus uses these comparisons to reveal what God is like. We are invited to see ourselves within the parables and hear how God is calling us to grow. Some parables challenge our values by contrasting what we think is important with what is actually important to God. Other parables focus our attention on our willingness to listen and respond to God. Sometimes the comparisons Jesus uses reference situations that are foreign to contemporary life, and they require some exegesis to unpack and understand the meaning.

► Which of Jesus' parables stand out to you and why? Are there any parables you find particularly inspiring or challenging?

In today's parable, the symbolism is pretty straightforward: God is the sower, God's Word is the seed, and the soil represents four different responses to

the message of the Gospel. The seed that was eaten by birds is like a person who doesn't understand and is unreceptive to any messages of faith. The rocky soil describes those who had enthusiastically received the Word of God at one point, but because it never took root in their hearts, their faith withered and died. The thorns represent the temptations of the world, which extend from the sinful vices of pride, lust, wrath, gluttony, sloth, greed, and envy. Repeatedly giving in to sinful temptations will slowly destroy our relationship with God. And then there is the rich soil, which represents all who are open to the path of discipleship, collaborating with the Holy Spirit as vessels of grace, bringing goodness and love to the world. Although the seeds of faith will die out for some, those who do respond to Christ will bring about abundant goodness.

► If you literally had a package of seeds, how would you go about sowing those seeds to produce an abundant harvest? What similarities and differences do you notice in how you would sow as compared to the sower in the parable?

The parables often have unexpected, illogical endings—like sowing seeds everywhere, not just where growth is guaranteed. God doesn't hold back. God generously spreads the seeds of his Word everywhere, to everyone, respecting our freedom to respond or not.

► What kind of soil are you?

Wrapping It Up

Consider these points to conclude the discussion and reflection. Integrate the thoughts and ideas that surfaced during the discussion as well as the "Church Teaching Connection" on page 222.

Parables are metaphors that Jesus used to reveal what God is like.

God scatters the seeds of his Word everywhere.

We choose what kind of soil we will be by our receptivity and response.

Act on the Word

Cultivating Growth

For this activity, you will need a package of seeds, planting soil, spoons to scoop the soil, and containers (like cups) to hold the seed-planted-in-soil.

This activity helps us to expand upon the imagery in the parable of the sower and one's receptivity to the Word. Begin by distributing the materials to literally plant seeds in soil. As the teens plant their seeds, invite discussion with the following questions:

- ✳ In addition to the soil, what is absolutely necessary to help the seed to grow? (Answer: sunlight and water.)
- ✳ If God's Word is the seed and you are the soil, what could sunlight and water represent in this analogy?
- ✳ What helps you to be receptive and responsive like the rich soil?

As the teens finish planting their seeds and expanding the metaphor, focus the conversation on the ways in which we can help cultivate deep roots with abundant fruit. Guide the discussion to include reflections on evangelization. Cultivating fertile soil relates to "evangelization," which means bringing the Good News of Jesus Christ into every human situation. The early task of evangelization for the first followers of Christ was to help bring the seeds of God's Word to all the ends of the earth, also known as missionary work. Pope John Paul II pointed out the need for a "new evangelization," reaching out to those who are no longer practicing their faith for whatever reason, as well as "re-evangelizing" those who are committed Catholics, but may have lost their fervor for God. Both of these require us to not just scatter the seeds of God's Word, but also help nurture and cultivate the growth of seeds that have been planted. This is our responsibility to each other as members of the Body of Christ. Discuss how we can build upon the metaphor in Jesus' parable to incorporate both the new evangelization and re-evangelization.

Closing Prayer

*Loving and merciful God,
you sent your Word among us
to bring forth life
and to renew the face of the earth.*

*Open our hearts
to receive the Word that became flesh in
your Son, Jesus Christ,
who lives and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God, for ever and ever.
Amen.*

For Next Sunday

To help teens prepare for next Sunday's Mass, print, email, or share on a blog or social media the handout found on the next page. The JPG and PDF files are available at www.ltp.org/lwgr. Encourage teens to attend Mass with family or friends.