

15<sup>th</sup> Sunday  
7/16/2023

## A GENEROUS GOD

God is generous. This Sunday and the next two, we hear some of the parables of Jesus. The word parable literally means a comparison that strives to connect the familiar, like sowing seeds, to something new like the Kingdom of God. Good teachers know that it's important to illustrate their concepts with examples. If, as I do, you like clear definitions, then parables can be challenging but while clear definitions have their place, they also have their limitations, particularly when dealing with mysteries. The mysteries of our faith go beyond simple definitions. Definitions may be helpful but are still limited, precisely because they deal with mysteries.

Jesus distinguishes between his disciples and the crowds. To the crowds, at this point of his ministry, he speaks in parables while he explains and teaches more directly to his disciples. It's been noted that the disciples have already decided to follow him but his message to the crowd in parables to encourage them to follow him, to lead them to conversion of the heart. Unlike simple definitions, parables demand the effort. At times Jesus will speak clearly about who is. Think of the sayings like, *I am the Bread of Life* or *I am the Way the Truth and the Light*, but at this point in his public ministry, Jesus uses parables.

One author has noted that on a deeper level, you could even say that Jesus himself is the parable that God speaks. The human nature of Jesus both hides and reveals his divine nature. The same author notes that God doesn't force us to believe but attracts us to him while always respecting our freedom.

God is generous. Unlike our system of plowing and planting, the agricultural method of this sower is to spread the seed generously, to throw it far and wide, here and there, over a vast expanse of land. In other words, the sower is generous, and God is generous, sending his Son to reconcile all people to himself. God is generous but God also wants a free response. Hard paths, rocky ground and thorns don't change on their own, but we can change. We can cultivate the soil of our heart to provide soil where the word of God may grow.

The initial three categories of ground point out temptations we face and the first step in overcoming any temptation is to realize we're being tempted. The first category involves those who have been stolen by the evil one. Evil is real and has a source in an evil one who tempts us to turn away from God's Word because it is more powerful. The evil one can work by making people never think about him or by making people always think about him. The proper response is to avoid both extreme neglect and extreme fear and proceed with a cautious, confidence, aware of temptations but trusting in God.

Jesus says the evil one approaches the one who doesn't understand the message and this reminds us of the responsibility not only to do the right thing but to learn more about the faith. It's sad to think of how many people have left the faith through ignorance. You can't love what you don't know. People in love want to spend time with each other to get to know each other better. We have a responsibility and a privilege to learn and grow in faith. In this, we have first of all the Word of God, the Bible but we also have the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and two millennia of rich spiritual wisdom.

The second category is those who receive the message with joy but have no roots. This temptation tests loyalty and perseverance. As trees grow taller, they also grow deeper. To be rooted in Christ will sometimes mean going against the grain of society in what we do and say, and in what we don't do and don't say. It may include isolation, exclusion or even persecution as Jesus says.

The third temptation involves worldly anxiety and the lure of riches. After sin itself, the most destructive thing we face in life is fear. This anxiety can close us in on ourselves while the lure of riches can lead to greed and consumption. The Blessed Trinity is self gift, on the cross Jesus made an act of self gift and here in the Eucharist he continues to give himself and to invite us to give ourselves. Generosity can be an antidote to greed.

There's a difference between the soil of the ground and the soil of our hearts. The ground can't change itself but we can cultivate the soil of our hearts. We change that soil by having hearts open to the word of God even when it challenges and

disturbs us. We till that soil by prayer and making ourselves vulnerable to God's love. We nourish that soil by the Word of God and worthily sharing in and living the mysteries that we call the seven sacraments, particularly Reconciliation and the Eucharist. We prepare that soil by loving God and neighbor and realizing that we journey to God together as members of the Body of Christ, as part of the Church.

With lives of intentional faith, may the soil of our hearts graciously receive God's word in the parables of Jesus, in all the words Jesus speaks and to the parable *who is Jesus*. May all this bear much fruit now and in eternity, in a way that reflects the generosity of our God.