

HOMILY for 15th SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME – YEAR A

Today's Gospel & 1st Reading use the farming image to talk to us about the importance of being the good soil for the Words of God to grow & produce abundantly for the Kingdom of Heaven. Reflecting on that message, I'm reminded this cute story I want to share with you.

A farmer didn't have a chance to unload his truck before Church on Sunday. After the Service, a little boy saw the big load & asked, "What've you got in your truck, Sir?"

"Fertilizer," the farmer replied.

"What are you going to do with it?" the boy asked.

"Put it on strawberries," the farmer answered.

"You ought to come home with us, Mr." the boy said. "We put sugar & whipped cream on ours!"

Anyhow, the life of a farmer is busy & challenging. A farmer has to wake up early & work long hours every day for a successful harvest. His/her day usually won't end until midnight. But, the reward for his/her hard work & relentless effort is huge. At the end of a long, hard season, a farmer looks forward to a successful harvest. It is that fruitful harvest that a farmer has labored & risked everything to achieve it.

Surely there're a lot of factors involved in determining a successful harvest. The seed has to be good & ready to grow. The farmer need to work hard & care about the harvest. The weather has to cooperate & give enough rain for the seed to germinate & produce a bountiful harvest. Most importantly, the soil needs to be tilled, fertilized, & in the right condition to provide good nutrition to the seed. Without the right nourishment, the seed will not grow & produce a good harvest in the end. Because of the importance of good soil for a successful harvest, today's Gospel lets us know how various soil can bring about different results at harvest time.

The first type of soil comes from footpath, which is reserved for people to walk on. If a farmer uses the footpath to sow seed, he/she will be disappointed & end up with nothing. For birds will come & eat it up. The second type of soil is rocky ground. Clearly this soil does not give enough nourishment to the seed. Under the hot sun & tough condition, the seed cannot fully grow & take deep root. It'll gradually wither & die. The third type of soil is among thorns & hazardous stuffs. This environment would prevent it from growing strong & eventually choke it. Surely these three types of soil are not the right environment for a seed to grow & thrive. It can't produce good harvest & make the farmer happy. However, the fourth type of soil is the good, fertile land, which is an ideal environment for a farmer to plant & grow things. A seed that is sown on this land will have enough nourishment & grow strong. At the end of the growing season, the farmer will be blessed with a successful harvest. The seed will be able to produce a hundred, sixty, or thirty-fold. Certainly the fourth type of soil is the perfect environment that every farmer would want to grow & sow things. For it will yield abundantly at harvest time.

Jesus wants to use the farming analogy to share with us various environment that the Words of God might end up. The first type of soil or footpath is an environment that "the person who hears the message about the Kingdom of God without understanding it. The evil one approaches him to steal away what was sown in his mind." Surely the Words of God do not have any chance to take root & stay with this person. He/she closes his/her mind & heart to the Words of God & do not give them a chance to grow & make a difference in his/her life. The second type of soil or rocky ground in an environment that "the person who hears the message & at first receives it with joy. But, he has no roots & hence lasts only for a time. When some setback or persecution involving the message occurs, he soon falters." Apparently the Word of God were first welcomes with great joy. But this person does not embrace them fully & allow them to be part of his/her life. When tough time or persecution happens, he/she abandons the Words of God without any regret. We often identify a person like this as "fallen-away Catholic/Christian." Similarly, the third type of soil or the land among thorns is an environment that "the

person who hear the message, but then the worldly anxiety & the lure of money choke it off. Such a person produces no yield." Evidently the Words of God were accepted openly at first. But this person allows worldly things to fill his/her heart & they eventually take over his/her life. The Words of God finally have no more room to grow & cannot stay with this person any more. So, the end up producing nothing. This person is usually referred to as "fallen-away Catholic/Christian also."

However, the fourth type of soil or the ideal land is an environment that "the person who hears the message & takes it in. He/she will bear a yield of a hundred- or sixty- or thirty-fold." The Words of God surely have found a dwelling with this person & will be able to grow & produce abundantly. The result is a meaningful & productive life for God & the Kingdom of Heaven. We see many examples of this special soil in the lives of saints & good Christians. Our Christian tradition tells us that without the saints & dedicated Christians, we would not have successful Christian harvest over the last two thousand years & our Christian faith would not be spread to the four corners of the earth. The blood of the martyrs & the sweat of the missionaries has fertilized the soil of our Christian faith & helped it bear much fruit for the Kingdom of Heaven. But, it's not just the Christian faith that has benefited from the good soil of the saints & holy Christians. Those folks have also found joy & purpose for their lives. Those are some of the blessings of the good soil.

My dear brothers & sisters, we all want to be the good soil & bring about a successful harvest for Jesus & His Kingdom. But, that would happen only if we're willing to make sacrifices for Him & witness His Good News to the world. The saints & holy Christians have done it over the last two thousand years. Hopefully we can do the same & produce thirty, sixty, or a hundred more Christians for Jesus & His Kingdom.