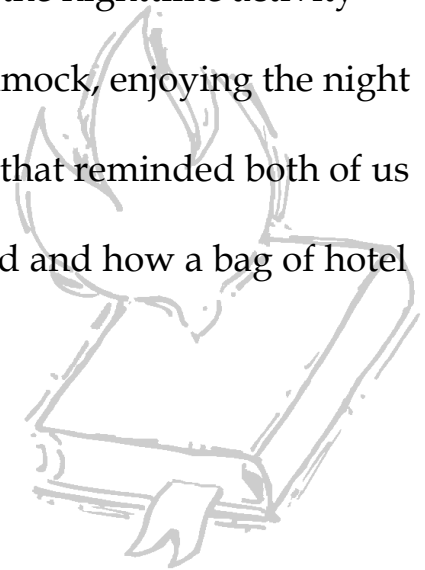


Homily
15th Sunday OT - A
Rev. Peter G. Jankowski
July 11-12, 2020

Is 55: 10-11
Ps 65: 10, 11, 12-13, 14
Rom 8: 18-23
Mt 13: 1-23

A few years ago, I worked a couple of weeks in a mission parish in a Mexican city called Quechultenango. This was a time during my last years of seminary formation when the Archdiocese of Chicago ran a mission in this very poor city of Mexico, a city where having a concrete floor was a sign of wealth and luxury for a people that literally lived in the dirt. As part of our seminary formation, both Fr. Mike Pennock and I lived at the city's rectory, which was considered the "richest" building in town (it seems that the folks there invested their resources into the church building as a sign of hope that God would carry them through their life of poverty). While living at the parish, the nighttime activity that Fr. Mike and I enjoyed was sitting in a hammock, enjoying the night sky and spending time with a very holy people that reminded both of us about how life should never be taken for granted and how a bag of hotel



soap was considered one of the most valuable gifts we could offer a people in need.

Each month, the pastor of the parish of St. James (Fr. Gary Graf) would ride his *burro* up the mountain to the local communities, where he would minister to those who could not hike down the mountain to celebrate the sacraments. During my time in that city, I had the opportunity to visit the local residents, assisted the clergy who offered the sacraments and learned a lot about the people's lives. During my time there, I also went into the mountains of the surrounding area, visiting some of the farmers that lived in those areas. They welcomed me into their home with a bowl of pozole and a refresco while they told me their stories.

While I was up in the mountains, I noticed that many Mexican farmers in the mountains did not grow crops as we do in this country. Here, in our very organized country that we live in, we farm very organized as well. The rows of crops are straight and neat. We build ditches between the crops so the extra water will not ruin the crops. We control the number of weeds and bugs that surround the crops by flying

an airplane over the fields and spraying insecticide on the plants. But in the mountains of Mexico, where none of these luxuries are to be found, the Mexican people could only take handfuls of seeds and scatter them wherever they can in the mountains, hoping that the seeds will take root and become fertile. Like our gospel reading today, the farmers literally cast their seed on the footpath, on rocky ground on bad soil and yes, at times, even finding good soil that would produce crops thirty, sixty and a hundredfold.

For me, there are two reflections on which I spoke with God concerning what we just heard in the scriptures today. I realized that I, as a sinner, am showered upon by the Lord so much wonderful seed and yet, because of my sinful nature, sometimes I allow the seed to take root and sometimes I do not. I also realized that I, as a minister, am called to spread that seed throughout the city, knowing that the fruits of my labor would be as successful (and sometimes as fruitless) as the Lord's example some two thousand years ago. I was reflecting on how frustrated the Lord must be with us at times for the lack of roots we

have in receiving his word in the same way that we lament about how others do not allow the seed of God to take root in their lives as well.

Our readings today show us that we all need to live in the mountains and become Mexican farmers. Our goal, as Christians, is to spread God's word to everyone we meet, regardless who we meet. The gospel tells us that some people do not let the seed grow well in their lives, but that is not the point. The point is that the seed is always planted, God is always present, and this offers us a great hope in our lives - even in the darkest of times, God is present to us. But we must do our part - we must plant the seeds of God in the things that we do. We must live God-like lives.

The problem with saying these things, by the way, is that we all know how much work it takes to spread God's word. We also know it is frustrating when we think some people do not understand God's word. I have heard some parents say that they are frustrated because their kids do not see God in their lives. I have listened to people who have tried to do mission work and find it very difficult because many people do not listen to the word of God in their lives. Yet, once again, our role in life is to plant the seeds, to offer God to others. Our role is to accept God into

our lives, to let the seed of God grow within us. When we can do our part in allowing this garden on earth to grow, then we take a step closer to seeing God in our lives. But we must plant the seed.

It is the Lord who asked us to help him plant the seeds of God's saving word, as he planted them, throwing it everywhere, with abandon, without counting the cost, without taking precautions about where it fell, constantly preaching, constantly challenging, constantly letting it fall into the hearts of those who hurt, into the minds of those seeking the light, into the lives of those who sought the fullness of life.

It is a hard work and it takes lots of perseverance. There are so many people here in this room who have been long at the work of spreading the seed of a gospel of life, of justice, of truth, of equality for the oppressed of this world. Today I want to highlight your work which, like what happened when the boy played with Paderwerski, is the wonderful result of the master working with the little people of the earth to create a new song of wonder and hope.

God's praise to you parents who persevere in planting God's seed of truth in your children! The difficulties are obvious and I'm sure they

never seem to an end. Families are busier than ever. It's hard enough to get everyone around the table for one meal a day, let alone take time to open a bible, to spend time reflecting on God's word, to take reflect together on the Sunday scriptures before or after Mass. It's not easy to compete with TV, soccer, band rehearsals and all the other activities that take kids here and there, anywhere but into serious reflection on their faith, God's word, the teachings of Catholicism. It's not easy to help youth understand why religious fidelity to Christ through regular worship is such a formative influence in their lives. Indeed, perseverance is a tough task and you deserve God's praise for sticking with it when it's more important than ever!

Today, I encourage all of you to go out to plant a garden today. I am sure that Ace Hardware and True Value Hardware have many seeds on sale, so I am sure many of you will run out of church today and buy everything they have. However, the garden I speak about is the love of God in this community. Every time we give another person hope or we help out someone who is needy, we offer hope and plant the garden. If we go to railroad days today and offer a smile to the people that we

meet, we offer hope and plant the garden. If we go home to our families and friends and do something together, we offer hope and plant a garden. Certainly, the seeds are present in that diocese this weekend. Pray for each other, love each other, offer the hope of God to each other. In other words, plant a garden! This is our prayer today.