

Homily on Mark 4:1-9

June 14, 2018

Mark 4 has gathered many of Jesus' parables into one chapter, and this is the first. This parable has many aspects, to reach its readers from many perspectives.

The first aspect is the activity and the result of the sowing of the word of God. In Palestine the soil is so rocky and poor, that it is impossible to plow and harrow. Instead the sower simply casts the seed everywhere on the ground. Some of it falls on poor ground and some of it falls on good ground. What Jesus emphasizes here is that, while he is scattering the Word of God everywhere in Palestine, not everyone will hear and profit from it. Nevertheless, those who do hear and take it to heart will produce thirty, sixty, and a hundred fold. The Kingdom of God will prosper and grow beyond all measure and even beyond all human expectation.

The Second aspect is the nature of the ground on which the seed falls. This is the aspect that Jesus emphasizes in his explanation of the parable which follows in this same chapter. The hardened ground which is the path receives the seed, but it lies only on the surface and Satan, just like birds, comes to take away the Word before it gets rooted. The seed in the rocky ground can get into just the bare hint of topsoil and then can get no roots in the rocks and so quickly withers. This ground symbolizes those who heard the Word with joy, but when trouble or persecution comes, their roots are not deep enough and so they give up the Word of God. The ground with thorns has enough soil to nourish the seed and so is symbolic of those who receive the Word, but worldly anxieties, the lure of riches and craving for things of this world choke it off before it can bear fruit. But finally, the seed falls on good ground, symbolic of those who not only receive the Word but nourish it so that it bears superabundant fruit.

The Meanings for us:

Both aspects bear a message for us. The first is that the Word of God is powerful and has produced more than a hundredfold harvest. By the time Mark was written, the Church had extended to Africa and Europe, reaching far into the Roman Empire. By the time the last NT book was written it had filled the whole Roman Empire, from India to France, and after two centuries of persecution it became the official religion of the Roman Empire. Even now it is in all this world's countries.

Its spread is due to its power as the Word of God addressed to the universal hunger of all human beings.

The second aspect speaks to us, the 21st century hearers of the Word. What kind of ground are we? Are we ready for the Lord? Are we thirsty for his presence? Is God really more important to us than our business, our recreation, our family, even our own lives? If not, then we are the ground on which the thistles and brambles, the cares of this world, are choking the fruit which we are expected to produce.

Here is the problem: our whole being was made to praise, reverence and serve God, to be in God's presence, to be united with God now and for all eternity. That is our total aim in life, and our deepest desire. But that desire gets easily obscured, drowned out by all the care of this world. And so we are unhappy, discontented, and do not live out the joy that our Pope is calling us to.

But the problem has its own solution---to get in touch with our deepest desire for God. How do we do that? We pray for it. Pray Psalm 42: "As the deer longs for streams of water, so my soul longs for you, my God; My being thirsts for God, the living God." Or Ps 63: "O God, you are my God---for you I long; for you my body yearns, for you my soul thirsts, like a land parched, lifeless, and without water." Start your day by offering it to God as soon as you get out of bed. Contact God when you say grace before breakfast, when you sit down at your work desk, when you meet friends and enemies at the coffee break,

when you come home tired, when you make love, when you close your eyes to sleep.

In the last analysis it is not in your power to make God come to you. God is always present to you, and the God who sows the seed will make sure that you grow in his love and be filled with joy. Then you will produce thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold.

You will be the Good news of the Kingdom of God.