

Fifteenth Sunday

The Parable of the Sower is one of many moral stories that Jesus told to teach us how we ought to seek out our salvation. Let us unpack the basic elements before we examine its content. Firstly, God is the Sower and he wants all to be saved, but not all will be. Secondly, the seed represents the truths of salvation. Christ imparts his truths to all people, as the sower broadcasts his seed far and wide. Thirdly, the same seed survives or dies depending on the environment in which it finds itself. In like manner, the same truths are given freely to all but not all bear fruit and are saved. This point is most important. If it is not the seed's fault that it died, then whose fault is it? Jesus explains that there are three distinct causes of the seed's death.

1. The birds came and devoured them.
2. Thorns choked them.
3. Shallow soil meant that they were scorched.

Apart from these natural and biological causes which are clearly explicable, we can draw a deeper meaning for our own spiritual welfare. Note again the three causes: one is animal life which is higher than seed or plant life; the other is choking thorns that is plant life vs plant life; the last is inorganic matter – the lack of soil. That is, something that ought to be there, but isn't. For example, rocky terrain, where the soil is shallow and thus only useful for grazing.

Now, in our own spiritual life we can see that the majority of people around us have given up the practise of the faith – for only one in ten attend Mass. This loss of faith can be traced back to the same three causes.

1. Birds. Higher beings have devoured these truths by lies and scandal. How many young people have been deceived in our universities and academic institutions about our Christian heritage and history, and the real existence of Christ. Also, lies come from the evil one and his spiritual predators who have devoured the hearts of many young ones by immorality and drugs. Is not satanism today a recognised religion in our culture? Is there not an unhealthy fascination with the occult in our modern world?

2. Thorns. Other people have choked or suffocated the salvific truths of God. How? Our politicians since covid regard God and religion as a non essential service. Church is not important – it is classed with entertainment. Constant social media suffocates our well being with physical pleasures while denying us of the spiritual truths for which our souls were created. Also, our medical professionals constantly clamour for our bodily attention at the expense of our spiritual and mental well being. Holistic health, on the other hand, can help both, body and soul, and increase our overall well being.

3. Shallow soil. Deformed spiritual growth is caused by a harsh home habitat. Harsh means devoid of virtues or prayer. The fruits of Christian living, just don't happen, they must, like the soil, be cultivated. Grace and prayer are the spiritual minerals and fertilisers that enable the soul's life to expand and take root. Otherwise, the faith remains only on the surface, (i.e. nominal Catholics), like the veneer covering on some houses which eventually peels off.

Let us be like the seed that fell on good soil and yielded a crop because it was fed by means of grace and virtue. Thus, our spiritual roots will be deep and we can contend with the issues and temptations set before us. One such person who struggled in that regard and produced much fruit was Saint Camillus. He was beatified by Pope Benedict XIV in 1742 and is the patron saint of the sick, hospitals, nurses, physicians and gamblers. Born in Abruzzo, Italy in 1550, his father was an officer in the army and rarely home and failed to provide much formation. After the death of his mother, Camillus grew up like his father with a violent temper, joined the army where the addiction of gambling tragically suffocated his well being.

After a leg injury, Camillus left the army and because of his abject poverty, the Franciscans cared for him in spite of his faults and flaws. They sought to cultivate in him some virtues, they tilled the soil of his soul, that gradually put down profound roots. While recuperating in a hospice, he received an actual grace, that he was called to provide care for the sick. The deplorable situation of the sick in the sixteenth century (before hospitals) inspired him to become a priest and found a religious order whose health care workers would assist the sick. Their uniform was a black cassock with a large red cross on the front as a symbol of charity and service. During, a horrible famine and widespread plague, 60,000 people died in Rome alone. Camillus wasted no time in reaching out to the poor, clothing them, feeding them, offering shelter and administering the Last Rites to the dying. Camillus went back to the battlefield, only now as a soldier of mercy, the red cross on his breast, administering to the sick and dying. His companions went into the battlefields of Hungary and Croatia in the years 1595 and 1601, and formed the first military ambulance. This was the original Red Cross, that gave rise, hundreds of years later, to the well known International Society of the Red Cross.