



My Beloved Ones,

In this Sunday's Gospel, we once again encounter one of our Lord's favored ways to explain and to teach us God's Divine Will, the parable. In order for us to truly understand a parable, we must first have trust in our Lord Jesus Christ. It is through our love and belief in the Lord, that we can come to understand His Wisdom. Worldly knowledge is not enough to grasp the meaning of His parables.

Today, I will try to explain some things relating to the Gospel Parable, which is the Parable of the Sower, who goes out to sow seeds on his land. Many of us are already familiar with the story of the farmer who cultivates his ground. However, although we may be familiar with it, and may even intellectually understand its meaning, without faith, it is difficult to go deeper into its soteriological message; which means of course, a message related to our salvation.

In this parable, the figure of the sower represents the *Logos*, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Therefore, as creations of the Logos, we human beings are represented as His farm. The seed that Christ then gives to cultivate us—His Creation—is His Word; and the soil in which the Word of God is received stands for our hearts. Of course, the growth of the Word of God in our hearts depends upon our personal relationship with Christ the Sower. This includes questions such as: in what way are we living, what are our motivations in this life?

Let us then discuss the types of soil, or the different kinds of hearts. First, there is the seed that falls along the path, and is stepped on, eaten by other creature. The hearts that are like the path are the kind that receive the Word, but are slaves to the ego; ego which was responsible for Adam and Eve's Fall from Paradise, through the Devil's temptations. Therefore, if we permit our hearts to act egotistically, the Word cannot take root. Often these kinds of people are revealed to us as atheists: those who do not concern themselves with either the Bible or the Word of God, and so hardly think about the importance of eternal life. Perhaps some of them attend church, but they do so only as a cultural event, not paying attention to the sacramental life, and receiving God's grace.

The seed that falls into the rocky soil represents us human beings, who many times, permit our hearts to be hard on the surface. Beyond the hardness though, are weak and infirm hearts, full of passions. If these passions can be nurtured from a young age, the Word of God may be received for a short while—but without the positive environment seen in relationships between parents, children and siblings, the Word of God will soon fade away.

This often happens when we see people who abandon the Church because, although they were brought as children, the faith is not truly deeply rooted in the heart. When the rocky soil kills the seed, these people cease praying, reading the Bible and attending church. They are then living in a worldly spirit, cultivating all those things that are against God's Will. Because they are not using the tools given to us for our spiritual uplift and salvation—namely the sacramental life—they have separated themselves from the salvation, which is only found in the church. Examples of this include those who choose only to be married secularly, in City Hall; those who attend church without preparing for the Eucharist; and even those who come to church, but do not truly participate with their fellow members of the Body of Christ. (At your own Diakonia Retreat Center, in the Panagia Chapel, you will see depictions of the Old Testament Prophets instructing the people the manner in which to properly prepare ourselves to communicate with God.)

There are also, of course, the weeds, which fast outgrow the seeds, choking and killing the seeds. These weeds represent when we allow ourselves to place a greater emphasis on material things, whether these are wealth, an important job, or greater status. Often, this materialistic mindset can cause us to forget about our brother, to push ahead of him in work and in life, so that we might receive greater glory. This glory, however, is earthly, and will not help us to enter into eternal life. In this materialistic society, this struggle is a very difficult one to avoid. For example, when we study, we can often study to advance our place in society, rather than to think about how we might better the lives of our Brothers and Sisters in Christ. Those human beings who fight to give more emphasis to the material life, and not the spiritual life, are ultimately losing their lives, because they have cast aside the promise shown to us through the Sower's Seed.

Finally though, there is of course the seed which grows and yields a hundredfold. These results are accomplished when we think of the others; when we resist our ego's pull on our heart; and when we make sacrifices for our parents, siblings, spouse, friends, and loved ones. When we do these things, truly His Word lives in our hearts, and we experience kindness, humility, love, and all the Fruits of the Spirits.

Even our Ancient Philosophers before the coming of Christ used to say, "*Do not do to others that which is hateful to you.*" This, of course, is the negative connotation of our Lord's *positive* Golden Rule: "*So whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them...*" (*Matthew 7:12*) In cultivating the Word of God and the Fruits that grow from these seeds, we are tasting Heaven, even here on earth.

This spirit of true cultivation is something that I pray for all of you to undertake faithfully; just as I ask you to pray to God for the same for all your clergymen, including your Bishop. God Bless You!

+ALEXIOS
Metropolitan of Atlanta