

LOOKING TO SUNDAY®

Sunday, July 16, 2017

The Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

This email, entitled Looking to Sunday®, focuses on one or more of the scripture readings for the coming Sunday. It prepares readers to hear God's Word at Mass and it offers a point of reflection to consider in the days leading to Sunday. Looking to Sunday is written by Father Tom

SHORT OR LONG

Whenever we read a famous poem or an acclaimed work of literature, we come away with certain understandings and impressions. But those understandings and impressions can be altered or changed if we consult reviews and commentaries dealing with what we have read or if we listen to teachers explaining the author's intent.

In this Sunday's Gospel, we hear a famous parable of Jesus dealing with a person sowing seeds in a field. Our understanding of that reading will depend on whether we hear the long form of the Gospel (Matthew 13:1-23) or the short form (Matthew 13:1-9).

In the long form, we hear the parable of Jesus followed by an explanation. In the parable a man indiscriminately sows seeds in his field. Some seed falls on a footpath where birds eat it up. Other seed falls on rocky ground and still other seed ends up among thorn bushes. In both those cases the seed is unable to develop and grow. But some seed lands on good soil and produces an amazing harvest.

In the explanation, the parable becomes an allegory that speaks of the different ways people react to the word of God symbolized by the seed. Some people accept the word but the devil steals it away. Others open their hearts only a crack and so the word has little effect. Still others allow worries and worldly concerns to overshadow the word and so nothing good happens. But there are those who take the word into their lives and produce an amazing harvest of goodness.

That explanation of the parable certainly challenges us to consider how much time and effort we give to appreciating the scriptures. The explanation also helps us to understand why some Christians live their lives according to God's word and others pay scant attention to it.

However, if we hear the short form of the Gospel, if we hear the parable without its explanation, the words of Jesus take on another meaning. In this case, the parable of the sower and the seed proclaims that despite setbacks, difficulties, and challenges, the message and ministry of Jesus will succeed.

In three of the four instances in the parable, the efforts of the sower produce nothing. The seed is lost to birds, to scorching heat, and to choking thorns. But some seed produces a harvest far beyond anyone's wildest expectations. For seed to produce tenfold would be amazing. But Jesus says, "But some seed fell on rich soil, and produced fruit, a hundred or sixty or thirtyfold."

The seed, the ministry and preaching of Jesus, was met with resistance and opposition. His own religious leaders considered him a false teacher and blasphemer. The crowds that followed him were fickle and faithless. His chosen disciples often misunderstood him and deserted him when

he was arrested. Certainly Good Friday evening, all would have thought that the seed Jesus had sown was as dead and gone as he was.

But consider the harvest that seed began to produce after Easter Sunday and continues to produce to this very day. The ministry of Jesus has produced far more than a hundredfold.

Standing without its explanation, Sunday's parable proclaims a message of hope, confidence, and success. It proclaims what Jesus knew in his ministry and that he wants us to always remember. Despite setbacks, challenges, persecutions, human weakness, and sin, the seed sown by Jesus will produce an amazing harvest. God's kingdom will come!

Long or short, Sunday's Gospel has a message that we need to hear.

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