

FIFTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Isaiah = Ī-ZAY-uh

A simple and elegant reading in poetic language that makes a direct and powerful comparison between nourishing water and the word of God.

Even emphasis on "do not return."

LECTIONARY #103

READING I Isaiah 55:10–11

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah

Thus says the **LORD**:
Just as from the **heavens**
the **rain** and **snow** come **down**
and **do not return** there
till they have **watered** the **earth**,
making it **fertile** and **fruitful**,
giving **seed** to the **one** who **sows**
and **bread** to the **one** who **eats**,
so shall my **word** be
that goes **forth** from my **mouth**;
my **word** shall not **return** to me **void**,
but shall **do** my **will**,
achieving the **end** for **which** I sent it.

READING I

Today's readings invite us to reflect on the full flourishing of God's Word in the world and the way it bears fruit in our lives.

The first reading comes from the section of the Book of Isaiah referred to as Second Isaiah (Isaiah 40–55), which is generally understood to have been written by a disciple of the eighth-century BC prophet during the time of the Babylonian Exile.

This short reading is part of the last oracle of consolation in Second Isaiah, which begins with an invitation from God to

come to the one who nourishes all of life. In the first part of the oracle, God acknowledges that Israel has sinned but invites them to turn to him for mercy (Isaiah 55:7). God also tells them that he will make a covenant with them and be steadfast and loyal to them (Isaiah 55:3). This is where we pick up today's reading. The prophet, speaking for God, says that God's Word is not out in the ether somewhere. Rather, it comes gently to earth like rain or snow that nourishes the earth and makes it sprout with new growth that returns to God as plants

and trees. Think of this as a metaphor for the human experience of the divine. Like gentle rain or sparkling snow, God's Word comes down upon us and infuses our being with God's life-giving Spirit, and we can trust that God will make his Word fruitful in us to the praise and glory of God.

READING II

Today's second reading continues our recent Sunday readings from Paul's Letter to the Romans. Here Paul is writing about the destiny that awaits Christians in the end time. He uses

For meditation and context:

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 65:10, 11, 12–13, 14 (Luke 8:8)

R. The seed that falls on good ground will yield a fruitful harvest.

You have visited the land and watered it;
greatly have you enriched it.
God's watercourses are filled;
you have prepared the grain.

Thus have you prepared the land: drenching
its furrows,
breaking up its clods,
softening it with showers,
blessing its yield.

You have crowned the year with your bounty,
and your paths overflow with a
rich harvest;
the untilled meadows overflow with it,
and rejoicing clothes the hills.

The fields are garmented with flocks
and the valleys blanketed with grain.
They shout and sing for joy.

READING II Romans 8:18–23

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans

Brothers and sisters:

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are as nothing compared with the glory to be revealed for us.

For creation awaits with eager expectation

**the revelation of the children of God;
for creation was made subject to futility,
not of its own accord but because of the one who subjected it,
in hope that creation itself
would be set free from slavery to corruption
and share in the glorious freedom of the children of God.**

We know that all creation is groaning in labor pains even

**until now;
and not only that, but we ourselves,
who have the firstfruits of the Spirit,
we also groan within ourselves
as we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.**

In this letter, Paul discusses the role of suffering as a metaphysical condition that defines life. It's a challenging argument he is making. Proclaim slowly and carefully so that his words can sink in.

"Expectation" is a focal word in this reading.

One of the more powerful images in Paul's letters. Emphasis on "all creation."

the metaphor of a woman in labor pains to describe the "sufferings of this present time." The pain is great in the moment, but so is the hope of a glorious new life. Paul recognizes that all of creation was negatively affected by humanity's first sin, but that creation has within it a deep longing to share in humanity's redemption in Christ. Paul says that human sin subjects all of creation to the slavery of corruption or decay. But we have hope because humanity possesses "the firstfruits of the Spirit." In the Jewish sacrificial system, the firstfruits

were the first and best of the harvest offered to God as a pledge of what is to come for the entire harvest. And so we groan as we await the full flourishing of the harvest or what Paul calls "the redemption of our bodies." To redeem is to "buy back," in this case, from the forces of sin and evil. As our bodies are redeemed through the death and resurrection of Jesus, we become fully children of God.

GOSPEL

The short form of today's Gospel is the very familiar parable of the sower and the seed. The long form includes Jesus' explanation for why he teaches in parables, as well as an interpretation of this parable. Parables are riddles that take the form of fictional stories designed to engage the listener in active thought. This parable is about a farmer who goes out to sow seed, which falls on four different types of soil and bears fruit in proportion to the type of soil on which it falls. The riddle or surprising

Slight pause between "crowds" and "gathered." The first part of this reading relates a well-known parable, as straightforward as it is compelling.

Slight pause between "seed" and "fell."

Here, speaking to his disciples about the parable he has spoken, Jesus initiates them into the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. A revelatory tone pervades.

Jesus uses Scripture to underscore the mysteries he is revealing. They are ancient mysteries.

element of this parable is the bountiful harvest that the good soil produces. Even today with our advanced techniques of farming, a hundred-fold yield is impossible! Hence, we need to look more deeply into the message of the parable.

Gospel parables often do not include an interpretation, but this one does. The seed is the "word of the kingdom" or message about the reign of God. The four types of soil represent the categories of people who are invited to respond to the Word. The path is so hard that the seed cannot

GOSPEL Matthew 13:1–23

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew

[On that day, Jesus went out of the house and sat down by the sea.

Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat down, and the whole crowd stood along the shore.

And he spoke to them at length in parables, saying:

"A sower went out to sow.

And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and birds came and ate it up.

Some fell on rocky ground, where it had little soil.

It sprang up at once because the soil was not deep, and when the sun rose it was scorched, and it withered for lack of roots.

Some seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it.

But some seed fell on rich soil, and produced fruit, a hundred or sixty or thirtyfold.

Whoever has ears ought to hear."]

The disciples approached him and said,

"Why do you speak to them in parables?"

He said to them in reply,

"Because knowledge of the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven

has been granted to you, but to them it has not been granted.

To anyone who has, more will be given and he will grow rich, from anyone who has not, even what he has will be taken away.

This is why I speak to them in parables, because they look but do not see and hear but do not listen or understand.

Isaiah's prophecy is fulfilled in them, which says:

penetrate the soil or begin to germinate, so the evil one is able to steal it away. The rocky soil receives the Word and quickly responds, but, as the plants begin to grow, the heat and lack of moisture—i.e., persecutions—causes the produce to wither and die. Likewise, the thorny soil does not produce results because "worldly anxiety" keep us from responding to God's word. The questions for us, then, are "What kind of soil am I?" and "How do I open myself to be like the good soil that receives it and produces more?"

The longer form of today's Gospel also has a section that explains why Jesus taught in parables, and it is not what you might expect. First, he offers a proverb that still holds true today; some have been given more than others, and the ones who have more will receive more. Second, he quotes from Isaiah 6:9–10, essentially saying that God ordained it that some would accept God's Word and others would not. As Christianity began to separate itself from Judaism in the second century AD, Christians used this text to argue that the

*You shall indeed hear but not understand,
you shall indeed look but never see.
Gross is the heart of this people,
they will hardly hear with their ears,
they have closed their eyes,
lest they see with their eyes
and hear with their ears
and understand with their hearts and be converted,
and I heal them.*

Here, he boosts the confidence of his disciples. By extension, this boosts our own confidence that we too are being initiated into these mysteries.

The explanation of the parable begins with "Hear."

Slight pause between "riches" and "choke."

"But **ble**ssed are your eyes, because they see,
and your **ears**, because they hear.
Amen, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people
longed to see what you see but **did not** see it,
and to hear what you hear but **did not** hear it.

"**Hear** then the parable of the sower.
The seed sown on the path is the one
who hears the word of the kingdom without understanding it,
and the evil one comes and steals away
what was sown in his heart.

The seed sown on rocky ground
is the one who hears the word and receives it at once with joy.
But he has no root and lasts only for a time.

When some tribulation or persecution comes because of
the word,
he immediately falls away.

The seed sown among thorns is the one who hears the word,
but then worldly anxiety and the lure of riches choke
the word
and it bears no fruit.

But the seed sown on rich soil
is the one who hears the word and understands it,
who indeed bears fruit and yields a hundred or sixty
or thirtyfold."

[Shorter: Matthew 13:1-9 (see brackets)]

Jews' refusal to accept Jesus as the messiah resulted in God's covenant being extended to Gentile believers (see Acts 28:23-28). C.C.