

Trinity 5, July 12th, 2020

Isaiah 55, 10-13, Psalm 65, 8-13, Matthew 13, 1-9, 18-23

In the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

In the 1980s, we were going to receive an exchange teacher at school, and I had to go to a meeting at the Central Bureau in London, where we were told that an essential difference between education in Britain and that on the Continent was that, in Britain, teachers were expected to motivate the pupils!

Teaching is about sowing seeds, but also about creating the conditions, in which learning can take place. You have to be enthusiastic about your subject. If you aren't, no one else will be! There has to be a disciplined atmosphere, pupils need to know what is expected of them, and you have to make them WANT to learn. The eleventh commandment in my class was, "You shall like French!!"

Even so, not all of them will be interested or they may find it hard to understand (I had very few like that).

Some may be keen for a while, but may get behind, not learn the material adequately and end up with gaps in their knowledge, failing to make up for lost time.

Still others may be trying to do too much, try to do all their social activities even at exam time, and their learning becomes crowded out with over-activity.

But for a large number, they understand it all, become keen and really flourish. The teacher can't learn it or do everything for them; they have to take over, assume responsibility for their own learning; and then they fire on all cylinders. I taught many pupils like that, and it was very exciting!

The point of today's Gospel lies in the contrast between the mixed results, which the beginning of the work of the disciples shows. and the fruitful outcome in the harvest. The parable is an encouragement to Jesus' followers, warning them that much of their work will be wasted effort, but promising them that God would bring results far exceeding their expectations.

I think that, when I was teaching, I learnt something every day. We never stop learning. So, as disciples, we are both sowers and listeners or learners.

Sometimes, the word of God may not make any impression on us. We may be in the wrong mood, not receptive. Or we may find some parts of it all difficult to understand.

Or our initial enthusiasm may be stifled by becoming busy with other things or faced with the criticism of other people. We may feel that it is making us unpopular. Some people may give up and wander away at that point.

Or we may feel overwhelmed by a lot of things to do, or difficult experiences in life, which crowd all else out or make us blind to the love of God.

Or we may receive the word of God and understand it, be open to what God is asking us to do, and so flourish and bear fruit for ourselves and for others.

However, we have to remember God's part in all this. The first reading from Isaiah contains the reassurance that God will fulfil his purpose. Here is a promise for the exiles returning from Babylon and a renewed land:

'My word shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.'

Psalm 65 paints a beautiful picture of the rejoicing of nature at the coming rain, which streams from heaven, the river of God. The bountiful harvest is the crown at the head of the year:

'You visit the earth and water it; you make it very plenteous.

The river of God is full of water; you prepare grain for your people, for so you provide for the earth.

You drench the furrows and smooth out the ridges; you soften the ground with showers and bless its increase.

You crown the year with your goodness, and your paths overflow with plenty.

May the meadows be clothed with flocks of sheep and the valleys stand so thick with corn that they shall laugh and sing.'

Plants need to be looked after. As for The Revd. Debbie, one of my hobbies is growing roses. They need some help, so I have to fertilise

them, spray them against pests and dead-head them. Further along the road are three rose bushes in a garden, which are obviously not looked after. They look pathetic, and I feel sorry for them every time I drive past!

Pupils need help, too, from their teachers to help them grow and develop, build up their learning and gain confidence. When Jesus was preparing his disciples for the time when he would leave them, he told them that there was much more that he had to teach them but it would be too much for them just then. He had sown the seed; now they would continue to learn on the job, as they carried out the work, which he had asked them to do. He would, however, send them the Holy Spirit, who would guide them into all the truth. In the end they flourished and the results were greater than they could ever have imagined. We, too, need the help of God, both in our learning and as we grow as sowers, so that we can bear fruit, contribute, and be loving and serving people.

Like the teacher, God will work with us to nurture and support us in good soil, to feed us, and to bring the seed which we plant to full growth. If we open ourselves to the Holy Spirit, the results for us will be amazing and fulfilling, too.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Fr. Peter

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