



SUNDAY OF THE 7TH ECUMENICAL COUNCIL

October 16

THE GOSPEL READING

Luke 8:5-15

[Parable of the Sower]

The Lord said this parable: "A sower went out to sow his seed; and as he sowed, some fell along the path, and was trodden under foot, and the birds of the air devoured it. And some fell on the rock; and as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns grew with it and choked it. And some fell into good soil and grew, and yielded a hundredfold."

And when his disciples asked him what this parable meant, he said, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God; but for others they are in parables, so that seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.

Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. The ones along the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, that they may not believe and be saved. And the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy; but these have no root, they believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away. And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature. And as for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bring forth fruit with patience."

As he said these things, he cried out "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."



GREEK ORTHODOX
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DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

THE SERMON

Parables are stories using everyday life circumstances to teach spiritual truths about God, His Kingdom, and our lives. The word “parable” refers to a short narrative that has spiritual value, even if not necessarily literally true. There may be several connections between a specific parable and the reality it portrays. Parables are the teaching method Jesus chose most often to explain eternal life, and to show the love of God and the expectations He has for us.

In this passage, the Lord tells a parable of a sower sowing a field as He teaches us about our choices concerning the dispositions of our hearts. We may sometimes find ourselves not keeping the Word of God, and not bearing fruit (not improving our spiritual growth). Nevertheless, God calls us to recognize the hardness of our hearts, and to turn to Him so that we may open ourselves to Christ in the Holy Spirit and bear fruit.

The Lord teaches using stories of the everyday life of the common people. He does so to help us understand the Gospel. Behind every parable, there is a deeper meaning of our faith. Through His teaching, He shows us clearly and practically how to live a Christian life on earth and walk toward salvation, which means union with Him. The Sower, who is God, goes about in a field that has been plowed, walking in between the crevices with a bag of seeds, throwing them on both sides. He sows the Logos, the Word of God, so that He may take root in our hearts and bear many blessings in our lives and the lives of others.

In the first case, the seed falls by the wayside, so the devil plucks it because it does not take root and, therefore, is not “profitable.” It never bears fruit. In the second case, the seed falls on the rocky part of the field and does not grow any lasting roots. The temporary growth disappears when harmful things, like temptation or a trial of suffering, come to us. We might wrongly think God has abandoned us, so we turn our backs on Him and fall away. Again, the seed bears no fruit.

In the third case, the seed falls in the part of the field with thorns, and these thorns represent the riches, cares, and pleasures of life. In other words, the Word does not take root because the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life choke it. In the last case, the seed falls on noble and good hearts which hear it and keep it and, therefore, become profitable, as they bear much fruit and yield a crop. These are the hearts that are open to God, hear His Word, and keep it, the hearts that long for God to dwell in them.

Different situations may occur to us at different times, but they are not necessarily permanent. As such, the parable is both a warning (so that we guard our hearts in God) and an invitation to turn around when we have not kept the Word in our hearts.

Saint Cyril of Alexandria says that some of us might enter the church and feel joyful that it is full of people. We hear the Gospel and praise God, and we hear the sermon and praise the preacher, but when we go out, we forget what he heard and go about our usu-

al business without storing the words of God in our hearts. So that the Divine Seed (the Word of God) may blossom in us well, he says, let us first cast out of our minds worldly cares and unprofitable anxiety which makes us seek the things of this world.

God the Sower sows and teaches, and His Word falls upon His listeners everywhere. We might choose to become like hard soil, a rock, thorns, or good soil. Jesus says that those who become fertile soil do three things: keep the Word, bear fruit, and do so with patient endurance. Holding the Word with an honest and good heart, we “bring forth fruit with patience.” And this is a strong message for all of us today.

We rush daily to achieve our goals, even materialistic ones, in this life. Most of the time, we realize that we need patience to accomplish our goals. More importantly, as we grow in Him through His Word, we begin to understand and be inspired to rush with great zeal to grow *spiritually*. As we open ourselves to His Word, our hearts are set aflame to seek spiritual goals in our lives. Through patience, humility, prayer, participation in the sacraments of the Church, and continued study of the Scriptures and other Christian literature we achieve our goals.

“He who has ears to hear, let him hear.” Jesus often uses this phrase to teach us to keep our spiritual senses awake so faith can take root in our souls. We have human senses (sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch), and we also have spiritual senses that we obtain in baptism and the Holy Spirit. We *hear* God’s Word; we open the eyes of our hearts (also known as the nous) by participating in the work of the Holy Spirit. We *taste* and see that the Lord is good as we receive His Body and Blood. We *smell* the prayers through the incense and *touch* the physical creation which God has sanctified (icons, water, oil, etc.) As we develop the spiritual senses, we naturally begin to spread the Gospel and invite everyone on earth to experience the love of our God and Creator.

The impactfulness of the parables depends on the hearers’ *willingness* to hear. Jesus often calls upon His hearers to listen carefully, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear” Those who hear are like a house built on a rock (Matthew 7:24). We, as human beings, are created by God through the Word, Who is Jesus, in the Holy Spirit. As such, we have the potential to respond to God’s Word if we do not choose to close our ears to Him. Jesus not only speaks the words of life, but He *is* the Word, and He *is* the Light Who is life-giving power (John 6:63). God calls us to receive that Light and that life by opening our ears and opening our hearts.

As the seed grows in the field and bears fruit when it finds good soil, water, and sun, so also does the Word of God grow in our hearts to transform us into new people, when He finds the soil of *faith*, the water of *good works*, and the sun of *grace*. We, then, become the vineyard of the Lord, and we bear everlasting fruit.

The Son of God is the Vine, and we are the branches (John 15:5). The Father is the Sower, the Vinedresser (someone who cultivates vines). We receive His Life, His Word, His sacraments, and eternity, as He is the Tree of Life Who nourishes us, the branches. We

bear fruit for our own salvation, as well as the salvation of others. The Lord asks us to open our hearts to Him, to become hearers of the Word. We have the free will to make our hearts and souls fertile ground for the grace of God.

When we read the Scriptures daily, we become fertile ground for the Word of God. When we prepare our hearts to hear and participate in the words of the Divine Liturgy, which contains the Word of God, Jesus Christ, we become soil that bears much fruit. When we partake of His Body and Blood, we eat of the Tree of Life and inherit Paradise. By opening our ears and hearts to Christ the Logos, we are transformed, and with patience, we bear much fruit for our salvation and the whole world's salvation.

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