

Homily

Matthew

“Jesus deigned to teach me this mystery. He set before me the book of nature. I understood how all the flowers God has created are beautiful, how the splendor of the rose and the whiteness of the lily do not take away from the perfume of the violet or the delightful simplicity of the daisy. I understood that if all flowers wanted to be roses, nature would lose her springtime beauty, and the fields would no longer be decked out with little wild flowers. And so it is in the world of souls, Jesus garden. He willed to create great souls comparable to lilies and roses, but He has created smaller ones and these must be content to be daisies or violets destined to give joy to God’s glances when He looks down at His feet. Perfection consists in doing His will, in being what He wills us to be.”

– St. Therese of Liseux (The Little Flower of Jesus)

- I love gardening. You get out in the fresh air, it’s peaceful. You plant seeds and watch them grow into beautiful flowers. If this sounds too easy you are right. I love gardening but it takes work!
- You need to pick the right spot in the garden to plant particular seeds (some plants like more sun than others – some can bloom despite a particular terrain).
- You need to water the ground where the seeds are planted; and you need to do this on a regular basis.
- You need to tend to the ground and environment around where the seeds are planted, pull out the weeds; and, sometimes put nutrients in the soil to help the seed grow.
- In today’s Gospel we find Jesus speaking to a large crowd of followers, and Jesus talks to them about gardening pitfalls by way of a story (parable). But what is His real message to them (and us) as He uses the examples of planting seeds? As the Gospel continues, Jesus is pressed by His disciples to explain - and He does.
- Jesus tells us each of our souls is precious to God and destined for something great – to be His children, living in His Kingdom both now and for eternity. There is something planted in each of us – put there by God- a seed if you will. In His explanation Jesus refers to that seed as “the Word”.
- By “the Word” Jesus means a bundle of things. The “Word” is the message, the truth that God loves and cares for you; the “Word” is

the teachings about how to live a life pleasing to God; and the “Word” is the promise of eternal life.

- To live as God’s children Jesus tells us we must not only hear “the word”, but work to understand it, to cherish it and to let it be the force that drives everything we do. In other words, we must be good soil for the seed to grow.
- But Jesus also cautions us about some pitfalls we must avoid to protect our souls and the seed planted in them by God. Pitfalls to avoid so we can be good soil , so we can grow into children of God and reach our destiny.
- Each pitfall calls us to ask ourselves some important questions. Let’s spend a moment looking at each pitfall.
- Where in my soul do I place the word of God? Like choosing the best spot to place the seed in a garden, where do I place “the word” in my life? Do I give it top priority? Do I really care at all that “the word” is planted in my soul or will it remain a gift unopened and stolen away?
- How am I caring for my soul, the place where the word of God is planted? When we plant a seed in the ground we water it so it grows. How am I watering “the word” so it grows in me, gets deep roots and I come to understand it and rely on it? Do I pray regularly, read scripture often, and receive the sacrament of Holy Eucharist? Will I invest the time and effort it takes – on a regular basis - to water this seed?
- What nutrients do I put into my soul so “the word” planted there grows strong? Where have I chosen to work? Live? What type of people do I associate with most? What do I choose to do for entertainment - what movies, books etc... do I feed my soul with? How much time do I spend reaching out in love and care for others? (Remember, we are part of the soil *their* seeds grow in!!)
- Will I remove the weeds of selfishness, laziness, and indifference that stop “the word” from fully growing in my soul?
- Will I trust “the word” and rely on it even in difficult times? Or will I let worry and anxiety and fear cause me to forget to rely on this great gift God has planted in me?
- Will I make other things in my life more important than tending to the word of God planted in me? Will I invest all my time chasing after material things: money, wealth, power? We know what happens to our gardens if we neglect them for even a short time!

- It is clear from today's Gospel we have an active role to play in tending to our soul and "the word" that God has planted there, but we need to remember God is constantly at work in our soul as well.
- We can choose the best seed, put water and nutrients in the soil regularly, weed constantly – and we need to do these things – do our part, but, at the end of the day, the flower that was meant to emerge started as a gift from God. He is near and at work in us always, just as St. Therese reminds us when she prays: "*Lord Jesus, help me to blossom as the kind of flower you have made me and where you have planted me.*"