

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The theme of today's readings centers around the image of seed and the parable of the sower as manifestations of the Word. In the Book of the prophet Isaiah, he speaks of the word of God as "giving seed to the one who sows and bread to the one who eats," that is, one who imbibes God's Word and transmits it to those whom the Lord calls him to serve. The living Word brings life and is a reflection of fulfilling God's will and mission to one who is attentive to the Lord speaking in their lives.

St. Ambrose of Milan, in reflecting on the fifty-fifth chapter of Isaiah, encapsulating those who thirst searching at no cost and always seeking the Lord, offers this reflection. "The prophet Isaiah gives the invitation. 'All who are thirsty, come to the water, and you who have no money, come, buy, and drink and eat without money and without the price of the wine. For he who paid for us with the price of his blood did not ask a price from us, because he redeemed us not with gold or silver but with his precious blood (1 Cor. 6:19-20). Your debt then is the price that has purchased you. Even if he does not ask for it, you are still in his debt. Buy Christ for yourself, then, not with what few possess, but with all are capable of but few offer because of fear - yourself. What Christ claims from you belongs to him. He gave his life for all, he offered himself to death for all.'" (*The Church's Bible—Isaiah* by Robert Louis Wilken, Eerdmans's).

The Psalmist extolls that "the seed that falls on good ground will yield a rich harvest." As St. Ambrose insightfully notes, each of us, by virtue of being God's creation breathed into being in his image, is that "good ground." We know, by human nature, that it is easy to choke or drown out the seed, often out of quite deliberate selfishness or indifference. Our seeking the Lord while he may be found is a life-time call and encounter, continually summoning us to conversion of heart and discernment of spirits. St. Paul, in his letter to the Romans, describes this human experience thus: "all creation is groaning in labor pains." We are in a continual state of discovering God's will for us and ascertaining and attaining that will is often challenging and involves self-emptying and self-denial. There is cause for hope and expectation, especially in these times, we must keep our eyes on the prize. "Brothers and sisters: I consider that all the sufferings of this present are as nothing compared with the glory to be revealed for us." These words are supremely timely as we struggle to continue to make sense of these times in which we live. Yes, these can seem like dark times; however, for the Christian heart, there is a greater future hope which we will share in eternal life.

Jesus describes in Matthew's Gospel the parable of the sower and the seed. The sower is God and the seed is the Word of God. The images of the path where the seed is snatched up, the rocky ground where the seed is scorched for lack of roots and the thorns choking the seed are all reflections of our human nature. God wants to impart his knowledge of love to us but, because of various circumstances, we are not always able to make the Word a living, growing part of our lives. We want to trust God's will for us and yet, because of the trials and tribulations of life, that trust can easily dissipate. The rich soil is what we all seek to nurture in our spiritual lives so that, no matter the circumstances, the Word remains a deeply embedded truth in our lives. We know only too well how our faith is such an anchor and source of stability even amidst of challenges of life.

The parable of the sower reminds us of how important and essential it is to always discern God's will for us. The prayer of the discernment of spirits is so vital especially when we know the Evil One is always waiting for an opportunity to distract and dissuade us from contemplating the Word and living it out in our lives. Jesus understood this dynamic all too well given his own experience of being tempted by the devil when in the desert for forty days. We are tempted by many things and so deepening roots will help us not only withstand life's ups and downs but also to bear fruit which feeds and nourishes our call to be witnesses of the Gospel.

-Fr. Tom