

YEAR A - THE YEAR OF MATTHEW

# THE HOLY GOSPEL

PENTECOST 4 JULY 10, 2011



*The Holy Gospel is according to St. Matthew the Thirteenth Chapter beginning at the first verse.*

**Glory to you, O Lord.**

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea.

**2** Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. **3** And he told them many things in parables, saying: "Listen! A sower went out to sow.

**4** And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up.

**5** Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. **6** But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. **7** Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. **8** Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. **9** Let anyone with ears listen!"

**18** "Hear then the parable of the sower. **19** When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path. **20** As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; **21** yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away. **22** As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing. **23** But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty."

*This is the Gospel of the Lord.*

**Praise to you, O Christ.**

Sermon - July 10, 2011

Year A - The Year of Matthew - Pentecost 4

Isaiah 55:10-13 and Psalm 65: (1-8), 9-14); Romans 8:1-11; Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

A sower indiscriminately scatters seed on different types of ground, and the seed takes root and does or does not flourish based on the type of soil on which it falls.

The Greek word for "parable" is *parabole*, which simply means, "something cast beside," or, "something to explain or clarify". In Jesus' parables, something from everyday life is "cast beside" something else, often in new and unexpected ways.

This reading from Matthew marks a definite turning point in the ministry of Jesus. At the beginning of his ministry, Jesus taught in the synagogues, but now we find him teaching on the seashore. It was not that the door of the synagogue was finally shut to Jesus, but it was closing.

Even now, if he were to enter the synagogue, Jesus would receive a warm reception from

the average man attending worship; but the official leaders were by now in open opposition to him. By this time, when Jesus entered the synagogue, he would find an eager company of people to listen to him, but he would also find a bleak-eyed company of Scribes, Pharisees, and elders, who would be weighing and sifting every word to find a charge against him. They would be watching every action to turn into an accusation.

It is one of the great tragedies that Jesus was being banished from the synagogue. However, that banishment could not stop Jesus from bringing his invitation to men and women. When the doors of the synagogue were shut to him, Jesus brought his message to the village streets, hillsides, country roads, seashores, and homes. Nothing would stop Jesus from bringing his word of salvation to people of every type and place.

What we see happening in this chapter thirteen of Matthew is that Jesus is beginning to bring into full use the parable. The parable became his characteristic way of teaching. Before this time, he had begun to use the forms that were similar to a parable, but here he uses the parable in a fully developed and vivid way.

Parables were not unique to Jesus. Other rabbis used them in Jesus' day. However, nobody ever used them in the way, or to the degree, that Jesus did. There are more parables in Jesus' teaching than in all of the ancient rabbis combined. The parable was his specialty.

There are many reasons why Jesus would have used the parable. First, the parable makes things concrete. If someone wants to describe some abstract thing like beauty, you can spend a lot of time explaining but not get your point across. However, if I describe the lilies of the field, I have described beauty in a concrete and visual way.

Another reason Jesus used the parable is by what has been described as "taking us from the here and now to the there and then." In other words, if a person wants to teach about something people do not understand, one begins with what they know in order to take them to what they do not understand. For example, Jesus will say, "how do I describe the Kingdom of Heaven?" Then, Jesus will move on to a parable about a mustard seed growing to give an image of what heaven is like.

"Listen! A sower went out to sow." There is a mistranslation in that line. In the Greek it says, "THE sower went out to sow." In other words, as Jesus was teaching the crowd, over in one of the fields near the shore a sower was actually sowing, and Jesus took the sower, whom they could all see, as a text and began, "Look at the sower sowing his seed in that field." Jesus began from something, which the people could actually see to open their minds to a truth they had not seen. Jesus is using the parable and life experience to explain the mystery to the crowd.

There is another side to this parable and the story of Jesus telling it. Put yourself in the mind of the disciples at for a moment. The doors of the synagogue were shutting against Jesus. The religious leaders were his bitterest critics and were obviously out to destroy him. Was Jesus actually being successful? Behind this parable is perhaps that question that the disciples are asking themselves.

This parable talks about how God's Word goes out. It falls where it falls, on good soil and bad. To some it is life changing. To others it is a passing interest. To others it meets hearts dead to its power. However, the Word of God is life. We cannot judge the effectiveness of the spreading of the Word, we can only trust in the power of the Word. Some will reject it. Some will ignore it. Some will be hostile to it. However, for some it will bring life, and not

just life but life a hundredfold. What seemed on human terms a failing ministry of Jesus transformed the world.

There have been times in the history of the church when both the world and the church have seemed to have lost their way. There have been times when people's lives have appeared lost to the power of God's Word. However, the Word has power to transform, and it will continue to do so. Those who have ears let them hear. Let them hear of the mystery. Let them hear of the grace. Let them hear of the hope. The seed will grow and bear fruit, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty. Amen.