

Your Personal Garden

Homily for Sunday, October 14, 2012

Gospel Reading: St. Luke 8:5-15

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. In the gospel that we just heard, Our Lord, Jesus Christ, spoke 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 ...” Our Lord uses the image of a garden to describe the Word of God and he mentions three things that draw us away from the Word: (1) the devil, (2) no roots, and (3) cares and riches of this world. There is only one way to hear the Word of God according to Christ, “Hold it fast in an honest and good heart and bring forth fruit with patience.”

What does your garden look like? Do you see yourself as a gardener? Let’s take Christ’s image of a garden a little further. What does it take to have a successful garden? We need seeds, soil, water, light, and good weather. We need tools to work the ground, something to keep bugs and animals away. Of course we need effort as well. Someone needs to pick the weeds and rocks out of the garden. Someone needs to protect the plant from the elements and outside forces and help the plant grow. Sometimes you need to set the plants up so that the fruit or vegetable can hang. Sometimes you need to move the plants so that they don’t choke off other plants. And of course, when it is time to pick the fruit or vegetable, someone needs to do the picking.

Did you ever notice that the word “husband” is the root of the word “husbandry?” Husbandry is defined as “The act or practice of cultivating crops and breeding and raising livestock; agriculture.” The term *husband* refers to the Middle English word *husebandi* -- *hūs*, meant “house” and *būandi*, meant “to dwell”, so it meant “a householder.” In premodern times, a husband was supposed to protect and support not only his wife and children, but servants and animals of his domain. In other words, if you are a husband, by definition you are a farmer. Whether you realize it or not, your household, your wife and children are your garden. So if you are really bad gardener, you have a really bad garden. The author of the book I was reading even goes so far as to make the statement, “If you are having serious problems in your marriage, it is because you have not tended to your garden.” It’s something to think about.

Let me tell you, if you have never actually started a garden it is a tremendous amount of work. It doesn’t happen overnight. I actually started in garden in West Virginia several years ago. The first year went pretty well. The second year, I did not attend to it and was gone for part of the summer. When I came back, weeds and animals had destroyed most of it. In the third year, I was

in constant battle with the weather and bugs. I got so mad the third year with the bugs that I threw pesticide everywhere. No, we did not eat the few vegetables that year.

My point is that gardens, whether they are vegetable or your house, require tremendous amounts of effort. You can't be an absentee gardener. Again, Christ reminds us of three things that draw our attention away from the garden: the devil, no roots, and cares and riches of this world. The devil can be thought of as the passions: lust, greed, anger, sloth, gluttony, and apathy. *No roots* can be thought of as dissatisfaction. We all know people who are constantly looking over their shoulder for the perfect church, the perfect job, the perfect wife, the perfect everything. They are never satisfied and live their lives with no roots. And those who are *choked by the cares and riches of life* can be thought of as the uncommitted crowd. They are present but not actually committed to putting in the work that is required. They are kind of like the people on the show Survivor who want to eat the meal but don't want to set up the camp or lift and cut the wood. They would rather enjoy the spoils of life than till the earth.

In your household, what character are you? Are you content or constantly dissatisfied? I believe that we pass through the unpleasant parts of life; the important thing, though, is not to stay there. What we need to do is continue to till the earth and build a fruitful garden. How we do this you ask?

First, you must make your garden a Christian garden. It means putting Christ front and center in your home. It means taking down a few pictures and replacing them with icons. It means reading the scriptures and praying together as a family. It means coming to church as a family and prioritizing your life so that the Holy Trinity is active in your life.

Second, you must lay seeds and water the garden. The seeds are the teachings of Christ, the commandments of God: love, compassion, salvation, and hope in the resurrection. You must then water the garden, which means that you must reinforce the teachings with your own actions. If you will not show love and compassion, how can you expect it to grow in your own household?

Third, you must weed and prune the garden. This means that you must take things like boundaries and confession seriously. You must have boundaries and you must set boundaries. And when you have sinned, you must come and confess.

Fourth, you must be present to guard, protect, and nurture your garden. Absentee gardening is not gardening. It yields weeds and vermin. Many people today are obsessed with bigger cars, bigger houses, and bigger bank accounts. The parents are never home and their children grow up like little weeds.

Finally, we must be patient and stay the course. Building a Christian household takes enormous time and effort. Many people today see Christianity as foolishness and simply give up. Unfortunately, what they fail to realize are the enormous blessings that come to those who persevere.

My prayer for all of you this day is that you will go home and think seriously about your family garden. Is it healthy or is it full of weeds? Are you tending to it as you should? Are you committed to building up a healthy Christian family or is it in name only? What will be your legacy? Will your children's children be sitting around your table? Or by your example, have your children grown up to be absentee farmers themselves?

Let us never forget that God has revealed himself to us in his son, Jesus Christ. He did so to redeem us by the precious cross, so that we might have life in His name. I have raised some difficult and pointed questions today not to shame anyone, but as a reminder of what we are called to. Let us not forget that we are not alone. The Holy Trinity and the saints are with us to help us with our journey. Let us endeavor to build our little gardens with their help so that we may be fruitful and pleasing to our Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.