

## **FIFTEENTH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME - SUNDAY 12th JULY**

**Mass Readings:**     Isaiah 55:10-11  
                             Romans 8:18-23  
                             Matthew 13:1-23

If you are friends with a gardener - or are a gardener yourself - you know how patient they are. They spend hours preparing the soil with fertiliser, planting seeds, watering them, pulling up weeds, and taking whatever steps are necessary to ensure that the plants will thrive. They realise that the flowers won't grow overnight so they are in no hurry. Instead, they let nature take its course. Even though they cannot see the plant growing underground, they trust that it is growing. They take pride in seeing the first green shoots of growth just as much as they enjoy seeing the plant in full bloom.

God is like a gardener. Just consider this vast creation that God brought into being out of nothing. For billions of years, He has allowed it to develop and evolve. The same is true for life on Earth. When the conditions were just right, life began on this planet from single celled organisms all the way up to complex mammals. Then it was many millions of years later that He breathed into human beings a rational soul. Like a master gardener, God has patiently waited until conditions were right to introduce into creation His masterpiece - the human person.

God is also patient with us. He tends the garden of our lives with tenderness and care. Though He wants all of us to grow into the people He created us to be, He does not rush us. He allows grace to take its course in our lives. With mercy, He shows us the way we should go and gently guides us along. When we take the wrong path, He never fails to call us back and to welcome us with joy.

The prophet Isaiah tells us in today's first reading that, just as God sends the snow and the rain to prepare the ground to be fruitful, so He sends His word to prepare our hearts for the life that He wants to plant within us.

Sometimes, as people of faith, we can get anxious when we don't see the type of moral or spiritual growth we think we should have. We see the gifts of other believers around us and wonder why we are not that far along yet. We wonder if we're not trying hard enough or if there is some other spiritual practice we should be undertaking.

When we sense that anxiety and concern within us, it is time for us to take a deep breath and remember that God is the One who is working in our lives. Our moral and spiritual growth are His work. He is the One who works on our hearts mostly in slow, gentle ways that we often overlook. Though we absolutely must cooperate with the work of His Spirit within us, praying

and doing good works whenever we have the opportunity, we must do so with trust that it is God who is giving us the growth. Any virtue or spiritual gift we have is not primarily the result of our efforts but the result of God's gentle work in our lives.

We might look into our hearts today and realise that they are like the path in Jesus' parable. We lack understanding, and so God's word just bounces off us. It perplexes us and leaves us confused. In that case, we should invite God to give us the gifts of wisdom and knowledge. These gifts allow us to see things as God sees them and make our minds ready and able to perceive the meaning of His word. Then our ways of thinking and acting are transformed.

We might look into our hearts and see that they are like the rocky ground in Jesus' parable. In essence, we are shallow. We take joy in God's word on Sunday, but we lose that joy when we face the challenges of life on Monday. We have the gift to understand God's word but lack the perseverance to put it into practice. That is when we ask for the gift of courage. Courage allows God's word to root itself deeply within us. We live His word both when it's convenient and inconvenient to do so. Courage helps us overcome our fears that we will be rejected or made fun of. It ensures that we will put our love of God before our desire for the approval of others.

We might look into our hearts today and see that they are like the thorny ground in Jesus' parable. We are just too distracted by everything that is going on in our lives to listen. All our attention and energy are consumed by all our many plans. That is when we ask God to clear away the thorns in our life so that we can make space for Him. Even if all we can do is spare a few minutes for quiet reflection in the morning, that is all He needs to tend our anxious hearts. With time, we will come to realise that He has everything under control, that He will provide for us, and that we have nothing to fear.

We might look into our hearts today and see there areas of rich soil where God's word has found a welcome, laid deep roots, and has borne abundant fruit. Let us rejoice in that! In His love and mercy, God has been at work in us. And we can rest assured that His Spirit will not stop working within us until the garden of our lives is in full bloom with abundant spiritual gifts.

Jesus tells us that the seed is God's word. That seed is small but it has the potential for limitless growth. The same is true for God's word at work in us. No matter what shape the soil of our hearts is in, we can approach the Father with confidence that He can do great things within us. He loves us just as we are. Like a gardener who works patiently and diligently on their garden, God works patiently and diligently in our hearts. We only need to surrender ourselves to Him, giving Him permission to be our master gardener, and trusting that, with time, we will bloom in beautiful and marvellous ways.