

TRINITY 5
Isaiah 55:10-11
Rom 8:18-23
Mt 13:1-9

Australian grain farmers are meticulous about sowing seed in order to maximise crop yields. Today's gospel story portrays a farmer who is grossly inefficient in this process. Seed costs money, so why would a farmer sow seed where he knows it will not produce a crop?

To understand this parable, it is important to note that Jesus is telling it to his disciples as part of their preparation for their future ministry. Jesus is warning them of the likely responses they will receive from hearers of God's good news.

Seed doesn't germinate on hard soil because the birds eat it, rather God's word doesn't germinate in hard hearted people because they refuse to let it take root. God's word cannot fully grow in those who resist it or just want a quick spiritual fix without any commitment to God. God's word cannot flourish, like seed choked by weeds, in those who only play at discipleship – i.e. convenience discipleship if there is nothing better to do. Discipleship is about priorities, and Jesus had harsh things to say about those who do not make him their priority in life.

In this parable, Jesus is not focussing on seed and soil so much as on the spiritual state of those his disciples will encounter. His instructions to them are that they should preach the Word and leave the rest to God. The prophet Isaiah said the same thing to his people. They must sow the seed and God will bring growth, but without seed there can be no growth. Of course people have a choice as to whether or not they say, 'Yes,' to God. Without that consent we cannot develop a deep relationship with him.

Like human beings, God cannot make us love him or accept his forgiveness. Discipleship has to be a commitment to what we believe is God's truth. One of the spiritual infections Western culture is suffering at this time is indifferentism or relativism. This is the belief that we all believe in the one God so the different religions are just alternative ways to God. It is a, 'Whatever floats your boat,' mentality. Everything ends up in the same place so whatever belief you choose doesn't matter.

The theological root of indifferentism is the denial that our relationship with God has been damaged by original sin and is in need of rescue. The indifferentists have an image of a cruise ship full of people of all nations and beliefs or none sailing off to heaven. They then ask whether Jesus would walk along the deck and throw everyone overboard who didn't have a baptism certificate. "Does God hate non-Christians and non-Catholics they ask? But the true doctrine of original sin has Jesus walking on the deck of his liner and sees people from every nation and religious belief overboard, drowning, surrounded by sharks. He throws them the life-raft of baptism and offers to bring them into the ship of the Church if they accept his love and forgiveness. It is our self-centredness that separates us from God and Jesus and keeps us swimming in shark infested waters.

It is St Paul who writes, “God shows his love for us in that *while we were still sinners*, Christ dies for us (Rom 5:8). Jesus warns his disciples that they are to preach the gospel of the Resurrection. They are not to fall into the trap of thinking that anything goes and give the people what they want in terms of shorter, slicker, God-lite worship yet loaded up with a sense of community, fellowship, justice and inclusivity. I really wish Catholics would read the Scriptures rather than a comic cuts version of them. It would be wonderful if all the delegates attending the Plenary Council next year had to complete a refresher on the Catholic faith and the nature of the Church before the sessions began.

Some people do not like it, but that doesn't negate the truth of the statement that 'extra ecclesiam nulla salus.' 'Outside the Church there is no salvation.' This is because all salvation comes from Christ who is the Way, the Truth and the Life and Head of his mystical body the Church. No-one comes to the Father except through him.

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