



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

15th Sunday in Ordinary Time - Year A

The sower goes out with seed for the sowing

Readings: Isaiah 55:10-11, Ps 65, Romans 8: 18-23, Matthew 13: 1-23

Many happy years of my childhood were spent at my beloved grandmother's house. We all lived there, a mortgage was beyond us. When I returned from the neighbouring park after rackets games of endless football, I would unwind in her garden and wander down the tiny private sunlit corridor of greenery that was separate from the main lawn and pond. One of the attractions was its sudden privacy. The other was that, in summer, the narrow beds were ablaze with English marigolds – not those French pom-poms but *Calendula Officinalis* - Mary's Gold, the golden crown of Our Lady that circles the earth. In those days I knew nothing of official Latin names or Our Lady or the healing power of this common flower. All I knew and remembered was the dazzling sunburst of colour that illuminated the little private space. Everywhere I have lived since I have tried to have a little patch of these glorious and simple flowers as a thankful remembrance of a glorious and happy childhood.

Today I have brought some along to share with you. Here they are.

I confess that they do not look much now and indeed, unless you have sharp eyes and effect the very un-catholic practice of sitting in the front pew, you may not be able to see them at all. These tiny curves of dust are, of course,

the seeds. If one did not know one could not imagine the glory hidden within this simple code of life. Yet herein is the secret life that, in the right conditions, will sprout and root and leaf and flower its dazzling radiance all summer long.

When Jesus told the parable of the Sower He was not thinking marigold, I accept, but He was thinking like a countryman and the truth He tells His people in this simple story is born of His own divine knowledge of the mystery of creation which He, as the Word, brought into being.

The disciples have to understand two things. First, in their evangelistic ministry, they will be sowers of the seed of the Word of God and they must be profligate with that seed for they do not know, for the most part, the state of the hearts into which they sow. Sometimes the most likely people reject the Word and the most unlikely shockingly accept Him. We are not the judges of men's hearts, just the sowers of the seed.

Secondly that there will be many and varied responses. Jesus lists some of them. But these responses are not just a tick box exercise of our evangelist successes and failures, they are also a checklist of the state of our own hearts.

The first response Jesus notes is the path's response. Well-trodden and compacted, on the busy thoroughfare, this heart offers no welcome to the urgent seed. The seed never penetrates, is never allowed to transform this barren patch into a thing of beauty. Christ tells us that the Devil swoops like birds to carry the hope of life away. It is common today for most people to deny the existence of the Devil. No-one could be more delighted by this

ignorance than the Devil, the enemy of life. Unrecognised by most he is able to pursue his ministry of deceit and ruin covertly with devastating consequence. Look around you. Jesus knew the reality of the rebel angel and most priests worth their salt encounter him pretty regularly. The truth, hidden in the seed of the Word, will come to nothing if it is not internalised. It will be swept away in the trite assertions of secular debate and diabolical philosophies and life will be lost.

There is next a heart that embraces the seed, is full of early joy and enthusiasm, florid with good intention and with all the appearances of spiritual promise. But no substantial root is put down – all the growth is upward. Without being deeply rooted we can never withstand the fierce challenges to the Faith or the scorching blaze of persecution. We are not so far off those times again, brothers and sisters. It is wonderful when people convert full of enthusiasm but we must make sure their formation is deepened and sure – and, in so doing, it is a reminder to us to do the same.

Then there is the heart where all goes well until the weeds and thorns, the distractions, preoccupations, misplaced priorities, the search for things and wealth and comfort, usurp the growing ground and strangle our love for Christ. Part of our regular examination of conscience before confession is to review how our priorities have gone awry, how Christ has come a poor second to inconsequential tripe. Confession is the essential weeding of the soul. We must not neglect it or the garden of the soul rapidly becomes a jungle of disorder.

Finally the good heart, where the seed is taken in, where the Word is understood, where the tilth is deep, ploughed by prayer, watered by the

tears of penitence. This is a heart where the root goes deep and there will be great fruitfulness. It is one those souls that the spiritual master, the psalmist, describes as 'a valley so thick with corn that they shout for joy, yes they sing'. This is a heart full of praise overflowing with the love of Jesus. 'Abundance flows in his steps'.

Not only are we to receive the seed, the Word which is Jesus, deep in our hearts, understand it and bring forth fruit but we, in our turn, must be profligate, generous sowers, sharing the Faith, introducing others to the love of Jesus.

And when, this summer, you see the humble but brilliant marigold, remember that it is named for Mary's Gold, the very treasure of Our Lady's heart – which is Jesus. And that is a little ikon of the glory that we must radiate in the season of our earthly days.

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