

Sunday 12 July 2020 Fifth Sunday after Trinity

COLLECT Almighty and everlasting God, by whose Spirit the whole body of the Church is governed and sanctified: hear our prayer which we offer for all your faithful people, that in their vocation and ministry they may serve you in holiness and truth to the glory of your name; through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

FIRST READING Isaiah 55:10-13. Thus says the LORD: As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it. For you shall go out in joy, and be led back in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall burst into song, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress; instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle; and it shall be to the LORD for a memorial, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.

PSALM 65: [1-8]. 9-13 **R** *To you, O God, shall all flesh come, [and you will blot out their sins].* [You are to be praised, O God, in Zion; to you shall vows be performed in Jerusalem. To you that hear prayer shall all flesh come, because of their transgressions. **R** Our sins are stronger than we are, but you will blot them out. Happy are they whom you choose and draw to your courts to dwell there! They will be satisfied by the beauty of your house, by the holiness of your temple. **R** Awesome things will you show us in your righteousness, O God of our salvation, O Hope of all the ends of the earth and of the seas that are far away. You make fast the mountains by your power; they are girded about with might. **R** You still the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves, and the clamour of the peoples. Those who dwell at the ends of the earth will tremble at your marvellous signs; you make the dawn and the dusk to sing for joy. **R]** You visit the earth and water it abundantly; you make it very plenteous; the river of God is full of water. You prepare the grain, for so you provide for the earth. **R** You drench the furrows and smooth out the ridges; with heavy rain you soften the ground and bless its increase. You crown the year with your goodness, and your paths overflow with plenty. May the fields of the wilderness be rich for grazing, and the hills be clothed with joy. **R**

SECOND READING Romans 8:1-11. There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law – indeed it cannot, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.

GOSPEL Matthew 13:1-9. 18-23. Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the lake. Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. And he told them many things in parables, saying: "Listen! A sower went out to sow, and as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. 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. But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Let anyone with ears listen! Hear then the parable of the sower. 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. As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; 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. 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. 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.”

POST COMMUNION Grant, O Lord, we beseech you, that the course of this world may be so peaceably ordered by your governance, that your Church may joyfully serve you in all godly quietness; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Sunday Homily 12 JULY 2020 FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

“Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain” Matthew 13:8

It is well known to those of us who grow things, whether in a window box, allotment, field or garden, that we need to nourish the soil in order for plants to flourish. We dose the small potted plant with liquid feed, we replenish the soil in our window box, we hump compost onto the allotment and fertilise the fields. In ancient China, every vestige of household waste was carried up to those garden-sized fields that climbed up the hillside. What was taken out had to be replenished and the earth could not produce good crops unless it had sufficient depth and fertility. However good the quality of seed, a rich harvest cannot be achieved without good soil in which to sow it.

In Jesus’ day sowing seed was haphazard. Weeds, most commonly a kind of thorn, were not cleared first, but ploughed into the ground. The paths through the fields became hard like roads, and seeds were scattered everywhere, on paths and edges and headlands where the underlying, predominantly limestone, rock came near the surface and made the soil very thin.

To his listeners Christ’s description would have been instantly recognisable. He was illustrating his teaching with everyday events, through the language of work, of weather, of nature. Jesus knew that if he spoke in the dry language of the priests, of the Temple or synagogue, the people would not hear what he had to say. Jesus was a country boy and much of his teaching involved the use of symbols taken from nature; he spoke the people’s own kind of language, and so they listened to him.

It is easy to become distracted when people speak in a way which does not relate to us, to our needs and our lives; to listen but not to absorb what is said, to miss the crucial heart of a message, which is what happened to many of Jesus’ listeners. Some listened but did not want to know. Some heard but did not understand. Some listened and heard but were too frightened of the challenge to respond. Jesus prepared the ground in the way in which a person of the earth would do, with symbols which spoke to the experience and hearts of his listeners. He valued each person in that crowd and when we value someone we take the trouble to approach them at their own level. The harvest of response we reap is worth every moment of effort.

And what of us? We frequently fail to listen to one another, let alone to Christ! We avert our eyes, use distracted sounds like, “Mmmm”. Interrupting, not allowing others to finish. Do we really listen? How often do you telephone someone and know, by the noise in the background, that the television or radio is claiming half their attention? How often do we ask people how they are because of social convention rather than wanting the truth and the detail of their answer?

If someone listens to us attentively, we feel valued. When someone speaks to us in our own language it feeds and enhances the person that we are, making us grow in confidence and self-worth. This is how Christ listens to us and how we need to listen to him, not only in our prayers but as he speaks to us through others. By this caring we nurture the seed of his love which develops and grows into a part of his great harvest.

But if our soil is thin, what do we do? How do we compost it? By prayer, asking for enlightenment and wisdom; by a good deed, a kind word, sincere contrition for our weaknesses; not by heavy and

self-congratulatory penances, but paying close attention to the ordinary events of our daily lives; by being fully present to each person, hearing his or her spoken and unspoken needs. Our compost involves facing and not avoiding life's unpalatable aspects for fear of them troubling us; it involves rising to the challenge of being fully human in the way which Jesus made transparently clear. This is the spiritual fertilisation given by God. When we accept it, it nourishes the life of God within us.

God is with us in the great and in the minute events of our lives. He speaks to us in gentle tones and in language we understand. Listen to him: he is the sower, the seed and the food for growth. Relax: the harvest will take care of itself.