

Let's Go Farming
Reading: Matthew 13. 1-9, 18-23
July 13th, 2008 – Ninth Sunday on Pentecost
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Parables are stories. These are stories that are used to teach a lesson by representing every day life situations. But parables are often times hard to understand. In fact, I don't like parables! No! They challenge me in such a way that I feel totally uncomfortable and at times like an idiot. I don't get them! I have to go back once and again to each parable, I have to read and reread them in order to understand what Jesus wanted to say with each one of them. You might think that today's parable was easiest for me, since Jesus gave us the explanation. But no, it was still difficult. However, since parables are illustrations taken from every day life situation, I will try to explain this parable in terms that I understand.

You might have already known that I was born and raised in a farm. Both my mom and my dad were farmers and we all took part of this experience when I was a child. During the weekends, when school was out, we would wake up around 6:30 in the morning, get ready and go to the farm to pick up coffee. I especially enjoyed sowing – not so much the picking up of the coffee beans, to be honest, but sowing was a great thing to do.

In March and April, my dad would get some baby coffee plants to sow in our farm. This was a big deal to me as a child, for I got to play in the dirt and have some fun, even when what I was really doing was helping my dad to sow. I still remember how it was done: take some measures of where the plants were going to be, put the baby plants nearby the place where a hole was going to be dug, dig a hole, put the plant in the whole, cover it with soil and water it. Now, the tricky part is that you must put the perfect amount of fertilizer in the hole before you put the plant if you wanted it to have a good start. After all this was done, you just had to wait about three to four years for the plant to give its first fruits.

This was the part that I liked the most. When August came, and the coffee plants where ready to bloom, the sweet fragrance of their flowers would surround our home. There is nothing more relaxing than

waking up in an August morning and smell the fragrance of coffee flowers before going to school. But three or four years for this to happen is a long time. People would just give up sowing if it was for the time you need to wait for a coffee plant to give its fruit.

Nevertheless, people continue sowing, they continue cultivating the plant because they know that, with all the effort, and time, and work that goes into it, there is something rewarding at the end. When the plants are blooming, the sweet smell surrounds you, and you know that you have done a good job. After a couple of months after the blooming comes the harvest, and when you see all those red coffee beans ready to be picked up, there is no bigger reward. In the case of the coffee my father used to cultivate, we knew that it was good quality and we knew that it was going to be processed into a good final product.

In today's Gospel reading, Jesus tells us the story of a farmer, or a sower, who goes out planting seeds wherever he goes. Without paying attention to the soil where the seeds are thrown, the farmer continues sowing because he knows that at the end, something good will come out of it.

Often times, people tend to identify the sower with Jesus or with God the Parent, and, as Jesus himself said, the seeds with the Gospel or the message of the kingdom, and the soil with the people who receive it. But there is nothing in the text that says that the sower is Jesus or that it is God the Parent. On the contrary, it does not say!

I'd like to think that the sower is the church. Yes. That makes more sense to me. The church, that body of believers who come together to do God's work in this world. We are called to be sowers, farmers, who walk with the seed of the Gospel and plant it wherever we go, without - perhaps - paying attention to the soil where this seed is going to be.

When I say "the Gospel", I don't mean that message of condemnation and damnation that so often is heard everywhere. The Gospel is that message which announces God's reign, God's presence in the midst of the people, which is the work of the Spirit. The Gospel is that message of love, peace,

reconciliation, and newness of life that Jesus proclaimed and lived. Jesus himself was the example of this message and he asks us to continue living it out by means of our actions as individuals and as a church.

That is the reason why Jesus, when is about to start teaching says, "LISTEN!" Listen carefully to what we are called to do. Listen carefully to what I do, Jesus says. It is not in my words that the message of God's reign is but in the day to day actions that I do. The message of God's reign is not in the beautiful words that we hear on Sunday morning or the words of the hymns we sing, or the prayers we bring before God. These are important additions of the message, but the reality is that our actions are the message.

At times we might want to give up because the soil is not fertile enough, or because we see how the seed is taken away, or because we have to wait too long for the seed to grow. We are called to continue our journey sowing and planting and serving no matter what. Listen!, says Jesus.

I mentioned earlier that when I was planting coffee with my father and sister and mother, the trick was in putting the right amount of fertilizer in each hole before planting the new tree. Maybe that is what Jesus is telling us in this parable. We must fertilize the soil where we are about to plant the Gospel.

Now I get it! Jesus is telling us that the sower has gotten it wrong! No farmer would just throw seeds around and expect them to grow. No! The farmer is to prepare the soil before she goes about planting new life. Listen! Now I get it... The church cannot just go around proclaiming the Gospel if we are not living it out among ourselves and among those who surround us. We have to prepare the soil, build relationships, get to know those who se serve, get to understand their situation and their realities. It is way to easy to just sit in our homes and give money to charity or come to church every now and then or to volunteer for a couple of hours a night to do something. It is something totally different to get to know the people we serve. It is one extra step in the process, and we might not feel like doing it. However, it is in that extra step that the outcome of our actions rests. We must be reconciling, we must live out in peace, we must love each other, we must live in newness of life each day of our lives if we want others to listen to what we have to say.

There is a poem by a Spaniard writer, Marcos Rafael Blanco Belmonte, the title is "Sowing", I translated parts of that poem for you today... listen that what it says:

Sowing

Marcos Rafael Blanco Belmonte

It was autumn afternoon when I went to the hill
and I saw the sower, smiling while sowing:
never in human history has existed such a man
that has worked with such a passion!
Curious, I wanted to know what the mad man
Was sowing on this lonely and ferocious mountain,
The man heard me with compassion
And with a tone of melancholy said:
"- I sow oak trees and pine trees and sycamore
I want the whole cliff to be filled with trees,
I want others to enjoy the treasure
These plants are going to give once I am gone.

That is why when, with sadness, I look at the world
I fight and work harder
For I know that my humble example is worth
Even when others think that is not enough.
We must fight for those who can't fight!
We must raise our voices for those who can't talk!
We must make those whose ears are deaf to our cries listen to what we have to say!
We must cry for those whose eyes can't cry anymore!
We must be like the bees in the beehive
That make sweet honey for all.
We must be like the serene waters that run in our springs
Giving to the whole world fresh water to drink.
We must follow the wind and be like it
Which sows flowers in the mountain and in the plains
And which keeps sowing love wherever it goes."

With noble melancholy the madman kept talking
And kept going up the mountain sowing,
And even when he was lost to the shadows of the forest, he kept saying...
"We must live our lives sowing! Always sowing!