

SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Romans 8:9-17; Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

There is a definition we've probably all heard of an optimist and a pessimist. A pessimist says the glass is half empty and an optimist says the same glass is half full. But did you ever stop to think about how terribly important the issue here is? It really matters how you understand that glass. What if someone asks you to share whatever is in it? What if you wondered whether you were blessed or needy, rich or poor? What about choosing to live gratefully and generously, or resentfully and selfishly? If we see the glass as half empty, it inspires one way of living; while seeing the glass as half full, inspires a radically different way of living. Yet both ways of seeing the glass are based on the same objective facts: the same glass, the same contents in it.

The parable Jesus told in our Gospel for today is at the heart of how we see things.

One place to start is by remembering that, these days, this parable is about us. That is, we are the sowers, we are the ones called to "go out to sow," to try to live as our faith calls us to live, to try to share our faith in word and deed with those whom God places in our path; to share the love of God so abundantly given to us.

So, that means doing stuff, it means action. It involves reaching out to people; it involves serving, and caring, and risking, all sorts of things like that. However, if we try to do this, if we try to offer ourselves, our time, our energy, our caring, to others, then before very long, almost immediately actually, we're going

to wonder whether it's worth it; we're going to wonder whether anything of value, or meaning, is going to come from all of our efforts.

We will wonder that, because we will quickly notice, that a whole lot of what we do is wasted. Nothing much comes of it.

Isn't that right? A lot is wasted. Hold on to that thought for a while, because we'll come back to it after another look at the parable.

The first people who heard this story knew all about a sower going out to sow. They saw it happen, they did it, year after year. They knew that seed was usually sown by scattering it.

That is, the farmer would walk along and toss it out in every direction. After the scattering was completed, the land was plowed. This means that when the seeds were being scattered, it was virtually impossible to tell what type of soil it was landing on. It all looked pretty much the same from the point of view of the one who was out there planting. What's more, if the sower stopped every few yards to take a soil sample, the whole town would probably starve. So, everything that Jesus said about problems, thin soil, rocks, fat birds, thorns, weeds, whatever, was old news to them. That was the way it always worked. Much, probably most, of what was being sowed was wasted. They knew that.

Now, if the important part of this parable were about the soils, and the difficulties that come with planting anything, and the dangers involved, and the seeds that would be wasted, then there was no big deal here at all. There was nothing new or interesting in it, the people listening already knew all about that. However, there is one thing that was really shocking to the first people who heard this parable, the promised yield at harvest time. Seven or eight fold was hoped for. Ten fold was fantastic,

and anything above that was simply unheard of.

Yet even the poorest yield in the parable was beyond their experience, and the greatest almost beyond their wildest dreams.

To promise this sort of result was more than optimistic, it was to live in a whole different order of creation; it was to operate out of a whole different vision.

To sow with this sort of hope and vision is to have a glimpse of the Kingdom of God. With this vision we don't mind the rocks or the birds or the thin soil or whatever else may get in the way.

All of that stuff just doesn't matter. It is swallowed up in the promise of the whole enterprise. This perspective, the promise of a vast harvest, is at the heart of this parable. After all, we already know very well that much of what we do is wasted. We already know what it is like to try and try and try to care, and to make a difference and not get anywhere, or not be noticed, or not succeed, or, perhaps worst of all, not even be appreciated.

We know all about that. If the parable is about that, then it doesn't have much new or interesting to say to us, either.

Instead, remember that the point of the parable is that, by the grace of God, the harvest will be great beyond whatever we can hope for. What God will make of our efforts is more than we can imagine. Much will be wasted, but that's all right.

The one who sows - that's us - does not need to worry about that. The one who sows is simply called to scatter the seed, to love and to serve, and to trust. The rest will be taken care of.

This is not because of our abilities; it is because of the power of God.

This perspective of hope and confidence is the gift of this parable. We are to love and to serve in a scattering fashion, knowing full well that most of what we do won't amount to anything, that bad things are going to happen, but trusting, none

the less, in the unimaginable abundance of the harvest.

Certainly, much will be wasted, at least as we see it. Maybe even our very favorite seed, our best, most self-sacrificing good deed, our smartest remark, our greatest insight, will end up on a rocky path, or inside some fat bird. But that is not ours to control; it is not ours to fix; it is not even ours to worry about. Each one of us, individually, and our parish itself, all of us together, have at our feet, fields to walk and seed to sow. We are called to do that. This parable is a gift to lighten our step and extend our reach. It gives us the wonderful gift of how we view things, so that we can wave at the birds and smile at the weeds, they are not our concern. For the love we offer in the Lord's name is the word of the Kingdom of God. And that word, God promises, will not return to God empty, but it shall accomplish that which God intends for it; and it will prosper in the thing for which it is sent.

AMEN.