

15 OT Year A Readings and commentary

Celebration Summary: Bryan M. Cones

At the height of the growing season in the northern hemisphere, today's liturgy offers a rich parallel between the natural world and the life of faith. The first reading and psalm imagine God's word as rain on dry land, which brings almost immediate life. Imagine how quickly the desert blooms when it receives water. Our hearts, too, though parched and dry, flower quickly when we but open ourselves to God's heavenly wisdom. It is to our hearts that the Gospel passage draws our attention. (Note the long and short form.) Preachers often focus our attention on seed and sower, yet the quality of the soil seems no less important. How do we receive the seed (Gospel) and the rain (first reading)? Can the plant find purchase? Does the rain soak in, or is it lost as runoff?

As if to anticipate our need, both the prayer over the gifts and the prayer after Communion ask God for growth: "in holiness and faith" and in "saving love." Indeed, without God's aid, we cannot receive what is offered. The opening prayers, on the other hand, focus our attention on the seed of God's word itself. It is the "light of truth" that guides us "on the way of Christ" (opening prayer). Just as we must receive God's word with openness, so also we must reject the "lights contrary" to Christ.

The reading from Romans ties these themes together nicely, describing the "groaning" of creation, wracked with "labor pains," for the full revelation of God's children. Just as the earth is yielding the season's "first fruits," we are also bearing even now the beginning of the heavenly harvest.

Lectionary Summary: Glenn CJ Byer

One of the overriding themes of today's three readings is the transformation of all of creation by the creative power of the word of God. Isaiah is one of the more complex prophets because scholars have determined that it was written in 3 parts. Today's selection comes from the end of part two, and is a call to the people to hear the word of God and be renewed by it. Calling on an image from nature of rain and snow nurturing the soil, the prophet assures all that God's word will have a similar effect on their lives if they are open to the message.

Writing to the Romans, Paul calls forth the image of a "groaning creation" ready to be transformed in Christ. Composed at least 20 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus, he is writing to a community that was still waiting for Jesus to return in glory, and he urged the people to be ready and open to more transformation even if they have received the "first fruits" of the spirit. There was more "life" to come which would be the redemption of their bodies. He emphasizes that "all of creation" will be transformed at the end of time. The parable of the sower, itself speaks of the challenges to preaching the word of God. It uses an image common to the time in which the seed would be sown before the ground was ploughed, thus some seed was always wasted on soil unsuitable for growing crops.

The interpretation given by the evangelist to the parable points to the difficulty that would be (was being) encountered in proclaiming the word of God, especially, the word of God as it was

known and preached by Jesus and carried forth by the apostles and community. Certainly, not everyone would listen to the message and put it into practice, yet, the apostles were told not to lose heart. Promise of the Word's efficacy is emphasized from Isaiah, that the Word of God will be transformative just like the rain and snow make the earth hospitable to the crops of the field.

Celebration summary by Dale J. Sieverding: One of the overriding themes of today's three readings is the transformation of all of creation by the creative power of the word of God.

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First Reading Isaiah 55:10-11

The rain makes the earth fruitful.

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah

Thus says the LORD:
Just as from the heavens
the rain and snow come down
and do not return there
till they have watered the earth,
making it fertile and fruitful,
giving seed to the one who sows
and bread to the one who eats,
so shall my word be
that goes forth from my mouth;
my word shall not return to me void,
but shall do my will,
achieving the end for which I sent it.

The word of the Lord

Commentary Isaiah 55:10-11 by Fr. Eugene Hensell, OSB: In the Old Testament the understanding of "word" (Heb=dabar) is never limited to syllables spoken or written in a message. Word signifies primarily event. We find this notion powerfully employed in the New Testament where Jesus himself is referred to as "the word become flesh" (John 1:1-18). The "word" that a prophet proclaims as well as the "word" that Jesus proclaims are also more events than messages. These words have the power to effect what they say. Is 55:10-11 is an excellent example of this powerful understanding of "word." Here God's word is compared to the power of sustenance experienced on earth. It begins with the elements of rain and snow from heaven. Their purpose is to effect fertility throughout the earth. This in turn will produce the seed sown by the sower which ultimately will become bread that nourishes all who eat it. It is this emphasis on seed and sower that connects this passage with the parable of the sower and its interpretation in today's gospel (Mt 13:1-23). The initial elements of rain and snow begin with God and ultimately return to God through the process of the life cycle.

The word of God is also about life in its fullest sense. This divine word brings with it a powerful force of creativity. When this word is unleashed on human history it has the power to guide, restore, change, and judge. It is equal to the very presence of God and all that implies. Sometimes this word calls people to accountability. Other

times is offers immeasurable promise. In either case, we can rest assured through faith that God's word will indeed bring about what it says.

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Responsorial Psalm Psalm 65:10, 11, 12-13, 14

R(Lk 8:8) The seed that falls on good ground will yield a fruitful harvest.

You have visited the land and watered it;
greatly have you enriched it.
God's watercourses are filled;
you have prepared the grain.

Thus have you prepared the land: drenching its furrows,
breaking up its clods,
softening it with showers,
blessing its yield.

You have crowned the year with your bounty,
and your paths overflow with a rich harvest;
the untilled meadows overflow with it,
and rejoicing clothes the hills.

The fields are garmented with flocks
and the valleys blanketed with grain.
They shout and sing for joy.

Commentary: Psalm 65:10, 11, 12-13, 14 by John Paul Heil: Main Theme: We celebrate the God who enables seeds to grow into a rich harvest.

In today's first reading from Isaiah we heard the inevitable effectiveness of the powerful word of God compared to the inevitable effectiveness of the rain and snow that God sends to earth from the heavens to make the land fertile and fruitful, providing the seed that we sow and the bread that we eat. In response our responsorial from Psalm 65 invites us to celebrate the Creator God's inevitable

effectiveness in enabling the earth to provide the things we need to nourish and sustain us. God proves to be an extremely caring and efficient divine farmer, watering the land abundantly ("drenching its furrows"), preparing the grain to be sown, breaking up the clods of the earth, "softening it with showers." The inevitable result is a marvelously abundant and rich harvest, poetically portrayed with clothing imagery--rejoicing "clothes" the hills, fields are "garmented" with flocks, and valleys "blanketed" with grain. So magnificently clothed by God, "they shout and sing for joy." We join them in praising God for his inevitable effectiveness in enabling the earth to so richly feed and clothe us. For all these divine blessings let us "shout and sing for joy!"

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Second Reading Romans 8:18-23

Creation awaits the revelation of the children of God.

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans

Brothers and sisters:

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are as nothing compared with the glory to be revealed for us.

For creation awaits with eager expectation

the revelation of the children of God;

for creation was made subject to futility,

not of its own accord but because of the one who subjected it, in hope that creation itself

would be set free from slavery to corruption

and share in the glorious freedom of the children of God.

We know that all creation is groaning in labor pains even until now;

and not only that, but we ourselves,

who have the firstfruits of the Spirit,

we also groan within ourselves

as we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.

The word of the Lord

Commentary: Romans 8:18-23 by Deacon Owen Cummings: This has to be one of the most lyric passages, hymning a paean of hope in that most systematic of Pauline letters, the Letter to the Romans. Paul makes four affirmations. First, the sufferings of the present are

nothing compared to the glory that is to come at the Parousia, when God is all in all, a glory in which all of creation will partake. This gives great hope especially to those who are walking through dark valleys. Second, humankind, through Adam, infected creation, or as Paul puts it, "made (it) subject to futility... and corruption." Implicitly Paul recognizes the abuse of our stewardship over creation in a way that has a very contemporary sound. Third, like a woman experiencing the pains of childbirth, creation too groans in labor pains as it awaits its glorious new birth. This too sounds the note of hope. A woman in labor hurts, but she anticipates the joy of birth and new life. Fourth, like creation, we too are groaning as we long for the final redemption, the day of the Lord. This period of waiting is a time of hope. Yes, we already have the Spirit of the living God, but incompletely. So, along with creation we suffer, waiting for the full manifestation of the Spirit.

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Gospel Acclamation

✠ Alleluia, alleluia.

The seed is the word of God, Christ is the sower.
All who come to him will have life forever.

Gospel Matthew 13:1-23

A sower went out to sow.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew

On that day, Jesus went out of the house and sat down by the sea.
Such large crowds gathered around him
that he got into a boat and sat down,
and the whole crowd stood along the shore.
And he spoke to them at length in parables, saying:
"A sower went out to sow.
And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path,
and birds came and ate it up.
Some fell on rocky ground, where it had little soil.
It sprang up at once because the soil was not deep,
and when the sun rose it was scorched,
and it withered for lack of roots.

Some seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it.
But some seed fell on rich soil, and produced fruit,
a hundred or sixty or thirtyfold.
Whoever has ears ought to hear."

The disciples approached him and said,
"Why do you speak to them in parables?"
He said to them in reply,
"Because knowledge of the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven
has been granted to you, but to them it has not been granted.
To anyone who has, more will be given and he will grow rich;
from anyone who has not, even what he has will be taken away.
This is why I speak to them in parables, because
they look but do not see and hear but do not listen or understand.
Isaiah's prophecy is fulfilled in them, which says:
*You shall indeed hear but not understand,
you shall indeed look but never see.
Gross is the heart of this people,
they will hardly hear with their ears,
they have closed their eyes,
lest they see with their eyes
and hear with their ears
and understand with their hearts and be converted,
and I heal them.*

"But blessed are your eyes, because they see,
and your ears, because they hear.
Amen, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people
longed to see what you see but did not see it,
and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.

"Hear then the parable of the sower.
The seed sown on the path is the one
who hears the word of the kingdom without understanding it,
and the evil one comes and steals away
what was sown in his heart.
The seed sown on rocky ground
is the one who hears the word and receives it at once with joy.
But he has no root and lasts only for a time.
When some tribulation or persecution comes because of the word,
he immediately falls away.
The seed sown among thorns is the one who hears the word,
but then worldly anxiety and the lure of riches choke the word
and it bears no fruit.

But the seed sown on rich soil
is the one who hears the word and understands it,
who indeed bears fruit and yields a hundred or sixty or thirtyfold."

The Gospel of the Lord.

Lectionary for Mass in the Dioceses of the United States of America, volume I Copyright © 1970, 1997, 1998 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Inc., Washington, D.C. All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the copyright owner.

Commentary: Matthew 13:1-9 by John Paul Heil: Main Theme: Preaching God's word results in a success that far exceeds all failures. The parable of the sower tells an agricultural story about what happens to the seed (symbol of God's word; see first reading) a sower sows. As the parable focuses upon the seed/word that is sown, it imparts to us the sower's experience of a threefold progressive failure of the seed to produce--some falls along the way, some grows prematurely, and some falls among thorns. But after bringing us through an experience of the protracted failure of seed to produce, the parable confers a contrasting experience of surprising and extraordinary success. Some seed does fall upon the good soil and "produces fruit." Indeed, this seed produces an abundant yield of "a hundredfold, or sixtyfold, or thirtyfold," which stands in stark contrast to and far exceeds the previous threefold failure. This parable enables us to share the sower's experience of the inevitable and overwhelming success of the seed that falls on good soil despite and along with the repeated failures of the seed that does not fall on good soil. The parable thus encourages us to "produce fruit" and be part of the great success that will far exceed failures to hear God's word, by repenting and doing God's will in order to become the true family of Jesus (Matt 12:49-50) and enter the kingdom of heaven. It also encourages us to preach the word of God's kingdom despite the many failures we will experience, because the success will eventually and inevitably far outstrip the failure.

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