

## Fifteenth Sunday of the Year

As I have explained before the gospel according to Matthew is arranged around five discourses of Jesus which model the five books of Moses. We are now beginning to listen to the third of these five discourses which is known as the 'parable discourse'. Hence not only today but also for the next two weeks we will hear some familiar parables; the sower, the wheat and the tares, the hidden treasure and the pearly of great price. If you look up and read Chapter 13 in the gospel according to Matthew you will see one or two others as well.

Jesus didn't invent the idea of a parable. There are a number of parables in the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) perhaps one of the most famous being the one that Nathan told to David which led David to recognise the gravity of his own sin. However the parables that Jesus told were original to him, and are an essential part of his ministry and mission, and we need to keep this in mind as we listen to them.

Today's Gospel Reading (Matthew 13:1-9) features the parable of the sower. I am sure many of us are familiar with this parable and its interpretation. Perhaps we think of ourselves as the rich soil that produced much crop, we might even have other people in mind when we think of the seed that did not grow because of birds, stones, or thorns. We might listen to the parable in this way and be able to say that we find it affirming and comforting.

Yet this is far too simplistic and fails to do justice to the parable. We sometimes say that the Gospel comforts the afflicted but afflicts the comfortable! So perhaps we need to listen again more carefully and apply the parable more closely to ourselves. Are there times when we have experienced joy in our faith but have allowed the fear of persecution to cause us to fall away? Are there times when the lure of riches has so dominated our lives that we have no time for anything else? Has my life borne a rich harvest for the Lord? They are the kind of questions this parable should cause us to ask of ourselves.

In the First Reading (Isaiah 55:10-11) God reminds us that his word does not return empty. We pray for the grace of a true openness to that word so that in our lives we can bear the rich harvest that the Lord has in store for us.