

Is 55:10-11

Ps 65:10, 11, 12-13, 14

Rom 8:18-23

Mt 13:1-23 or 13:1-9

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*Apple Tree Catholics*

A farmer owned a mule that was very important to him because it was a good plowing animal. The mule got sick one day and the farmer called in a veterinarian. The vet looked the mule over then gave the farmer some extremely large pills. "Give the mule one of these pills three times a day and he'll be fine," said the vet. "How do I get those big pills down the mule's throat?" asked the farmer. "Easy," replied the vet. "Find a piece of pipe with a bore large enough to fit the pill into, then put one end of the pipe inside the mule's mouth, put the pill in the pipe, and blow in the other end. Before he knows what's happening, he'll swallow the pill." It seemed like a good idea, but in a few hours the farmer presented himself at the vet's office looking terribly grey and queasy himself. "You look awful, what the heck happened?" asked the vet. The farmer replied, "The mule blew first!"

Today's gospel makes all of us feel like a mule in one way or another. Things seem to be going well for us, then one of those mules blows first. We've all had to swallow some large bitter pills and re-evaluate the entire agenda of our lives. In the midst of it all each new decision about who we are and what we ought to do is a new decision whether to say "Yes" or "No" to Christ. Yes or no to the simplicity of Christ's parable in today's gospel, which was as clear as the noonday sun to His audience.

Palestine is not a land of fertile acres. Its soil is poor, rocky and bramble-infested. Its fields are small and stony. Although Christ gave a detailed explanation to His Jewish contemporaries the real lesson of this parable was intended for all generations for what was true of the Jews 2000 years ago is true of us today. We too have the words of God in the gospel taught to us. We too know that heaven is our final goal which God has offered to us. We too know that unless we actually embrace the means God has given us all the tea in China will not get us there. As St. Augustine once said, "God created us without our consent...but He will not save us without our consent."

Let us briefly examine our souls and the kind of soil they provide for the seed of the gospel.

1. Is your soul the hard surface of the roadside where the gospel will receive no hospitable welcome? A soul so wrapped up in self-adoration, self-pity, and self-concern. A soul so hardened by cynical pride that it questions all authority, even God's word. If this be the case then the devil has probably already wired ahead for your advance reservation to hell's hit parade. "You may be a high roller but you'll end up a low loser."

2. Perhaps your soul is like a rock covered with just a little soil which has received the word but has no moisture to nourish it. Such a person is usually the “good time Charlie” who is all talk but no work, like the United Nations. He likes the words of the gospel and even accepts them provided it entails no hardship, much less makes him uncomfortable. But when hardship and sweat are called for this soul has no depth and the superficial shallow faith withers and dies, for it lacks the essence of Christianity which is sacrifice and faith.
3. The seed among thorns are the souls too occupied in making a million as well as headlines in the hometown newspaper that they haven’t got time to be bothered by the things of the future life. These are what I call “Christmas tree Catholics,” because like the Christmas tree they are big for glamor, for the razzle-dazzle, for being the center of attraction. But the Christmas tree doesn’t do anything. It just stands there. It doesn’t give anything but it expects you to lay presents at its feet. And since it’s a big tree that doesn’t have roots, a little push and over it goes. How quickly it is forgotten.
4. The good soil is the soul which accepts Christ’s commands and humbly takes up the cross, the cross so alien to the soft life of today’s cocktail circuits. These are the “Apple tree Catholics” who, like the apple tree, stand quietly, naturally and no big show, but are always giving. The apple tree gives beauty in the spring for poet and painter, shade in the summer for the traveler, and fruit in the fall for everyone. It is a strong tree that will bend, shudder, and groan during a storm, but since its roots are firm, deep and strong, it does not fall, and it is always growing.

My friends, despite the trials, trauma, temptations, troubles and tribulations of our schizophrenic, sensual and split-personality society, you are the good soil, the apple tree Catholics.

You are the wheat that has been sown.

You are the leaven of Christ’s society of saints.

You are the salt of the earth.

You are the vine planted and tendered by the vinedresser.

You are the infinitesimal grain of mustard seed.

You are the fig tree that must bear fruit or you will be cursed.

This is the doctrine of growthmanship, so that you will grow - not in loneliness, restlessness and selfishness, but in wisdom, age and grace before God and man. And that is why the man who hates his life in this world, preserves his life in the world to come.

As apple tree Catholics, you accept the suffering of today as your insurance policy for tomorrow, when you will most assuredly hear those refreshing words: “Well done, good and faithful servant, because you have been faithful over a few things, I will set you over many... enter into the joy and happiness you have so richly deserved.”