

15th Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)  
(Isaiah 55:10-11 / Matthew 13:1-23)  
16.07.2017  
*Heart*

Today our parable works at two levels. The first would have us ask whether or not we look at and listen to God's word. Are we free and open enough to receive the word of the kingdom when it comes to us? It is important to notice that we are supposed to look at and see God's word clearly. This strange formulation shows that Jesus does not restrict the notion of God's word to spoken words. What Jesus has in mind is, as he says, the revelation of the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.

So the first question is: are we on the same wave lengths as God? Do we both look at and listen to him?

Personal wounds, suffering, fears, laziness and complacency can interfere in our lives and prevent us from paying attention to God's desire to reveal his love to us. It may be that we need time in order to allow the penny to drop and for us to understand that we are blind and deaf to a message that, in fact, we crave for desperately. We may even need to hit a wall in order to realise how much our ivory tower has become a prison. We may have to go through a crisis in order to see that we have made idols of people, things and ideas and that the security they are supposed to give us is a false security.

However it can happen that we can see and misread the signs, we can hear and misunderstand the words. Here lies the second level of our parable: not only do we have to see and hear the word of God, but we also have to understand it.

From this perspective, the core of our Gospel passage today is found in the words of the prophet Isaiah: "The heart of this nation has grown coarse (...); they should understand with their heart". Jesus echoes these words when he comments: "When anyone hears the word of the kingdom without understanding, the evil one comes and carries off what was sown in his heart".

So the second question that we have to ask ourselves is: "Do we understand properly?"

In our modern mentality, the organ of understanding is our brain, in Jesus' time it was the heart that was the organ of understanding, discernment, decision-making, feelings and knowledge.

The reality is that unless we go back to our hearts, we may be able to see and hear, yet we will not understand. We will judge on appearances and condemn according to our short-sighted and narrow vision of things.

The Incarnation of Jesus, his teaching, his life, his death, his Resurrection and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit are supposed to make of us a new humanity, with a new heart and a new spirit (cf. Ez 36:26). We are new men and women who, living according to the Beatitudes, should be able to go beyond what is immediate and discern what is really important, what is at stake in the world and in the lives of our brothers and sisters in humanity.

It is very important for us to remember that we are not supposed to look for God's word outside this present creation. It is in this world, in the lives of all men and women that God sows his word, and sows it abundantly and persistently. God speaks to us through the whole of his creation.

Why is it necessary for us to come back to our hearts? Because they are the temple of God, his dwelling place here on earth. If we are situated at the level of our hearts, then we will see all things in God's light and from his perspective. When we are deeply settled in the promised land of God, when we are with God, then we are able to understand what he means when he speaks to us. If on the other hand, we live in the land of fear, anger, and suspicion, then everything which happens around us is interpreted through the lenses of fear, anger and suspicion. In this context, we may hear and see God's words but we are unable to understand them, and so the word cannot yield a harvest and produce as much fruit as it could in our lives and in the world.

The return to our heart is difficult because it challenges our simplistic and dualistic convictions, our tit-for-tat ways of relating to others, our superficial and self-comforting assumptions about religion and politics, about who we are and who God is. The journey to the heart is an invitation to understand and perceive ourselves, all reality and above all else God himself in a completely new way.

Using St Paul's image, we could say that to return to the heart is nothing less than a new birth experience, a letting go of the old self for the creation of the new self "according to the likeness of God" (Ep 4:24). This new birth may be a bit painful and yet we have nothing to fear because, in all this, Christ is our model and our guide.

It is important for us to remember that in our Gospel reading today Christ promises two things to those who see and hear from their hearts, to those who are clothed with the new self (cf. Ep 4:24): what he promises are healing and happiness.

The fulfilment of Christ's promise begins here and now. In our daily lives we experience healing and happiness each time we decide to listen to, understand and connect with ourselves, with others and with God from our hearts, from our real and renewed self.

From the core of our being, we are made able to understand what God says and to cooperate with him in his desire to heal us from all that prevents us from being truly alive and happy.