

15th Sunday in Ordinary Time (A) – 12.07.2026
Is 55:10-11 / Mt 13:1-23
To Understand

In the parable of the sower just heard, Jesus' main concern, and the greatest challenge for us, is understanding. In his explanation of the parable, 5 times Jesus uses the verb to understand. Obviously, the word of God needs first to be heard and listened to, but, ultimately what is decisive is whether or not, and how, God's word is understood.

It may be necessary to say that, while it is useful to know Hebrew and Greek languages and it is helpful to read biblical commentaries, it appears clearly in our parable that to understand is not first an academic process, it is not about acquiring intellectual knowledge. It is not first localised at the level of our brain. It is interesting to note that for both the prophet Isaiah and Jesus, the organs of understanding are the eyes and the ears and it is rooted in the heart.

The Greek word translated by *to understand* means *to connect the dots*, to make sense of the reality within and around us. Using an expression which was important for the Catholic Church at the time of the 2nd Vatican Council, to understand is to scrutinise the signs of the times and to interpret them in the light of the Gospel (cf. *GS*, n. 4).

So, for us Christians, to understand properly is to see things, events and people as God sees them, and to grasp what God wants to say to us through them.

The danger for us is always to try to interpret and understand what we see, read, hear and experience by passing it through the ultra-fine sieve or filter of our religious or political opinions, our past experiences and expectations, our need for security. When we do this, understanding is no longer about connecting the many dots of human reality in order to discern within it what comes from God but to impose on reality those ideologies which confirm our self-reliant and fear-driven ego.

The patient and sometimes demanding process of discernment comes about through respectful dialogue and tentative exploration; it is the fruit of our attention to the multifaceted human experiences and the polyphony of voices.

The Lord speaks to our ears, to our eyes; he speaks into our hearts and he expects us to understand, to contextualise and to discern what his message means for our lives.

In St Mark's Gospel, Jesus is quite clear about where the problem lies when he asks the disciples: "Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened?" (8:17)

As Christians, we have to be careful when we claim to possess the truth and to have grasped its full meaning and as a result refuse to dialogue with and listen to others who are different; we must be careful not to condemn and exclude others because of their race, religion or culture. As Churches, we have to be careful not to foster – or simply permit through silence – racism, as we have seen in Northern Ireland in recent weeks, as well as sectarianism, discrimination, and exclusion. Such toxic and destructive attitudes and behaviours are contrary to the Gospel.

In June, in his address to the Cardinals gathered together in Rome, Pope Leo reminded them, and reminds us, that what is required of the Church "is an attitude, an openness, a willingness to understand." (26.06.2026) This openness which finds its best expression in listening to and dialoguing with all is, according to Pope Leo, "an integral part of the Church's vocation." (*Magnifica* n. 2)

The word we have to hear, see, welcome in our hearts and understand is the Lord Jesus, the Word made flesh (cf. Jn 1:14). When our hearts are hardened and closed then we prevent the Lord from dwelling in them through faith (cf. Eph 3:17).

In the sixties, the American theologian, Paul Tillich, wrote: "Love listens, it is its first task to listen." (*Love...*, p. 84) These words are a key for the right understanding of our parable. Love is at the beginning, at every step and at the end of the story. We listen because we love, we understand because we love and so we bear the fruit of love.

Our responsibility is great because upon the way we listen and understand depends the fruitfulness of our words and of all our relationships.

When we speak from a religious or a political pulpit, when we speak to children, relatives or friends, or simply remain silent, what matters is whether or not our words, our silence, our intentions are "rooted and grounded in love." (Eph 3:17) If they are not, then we are like a barren land and a desert, a cause of misunderstanding, falsehood and division.

To understand Christ as the Word of God is to allow him to transform us and to make us speak and act in a Christlike way. The word is fruitful within us when we allow it to transform us into Christ in the world, when like him we are love incarnate at the heart of God's creation. It is love that the Lord sows generously and indiscriminately in our hearts and in the world, and it is such love that begets life.