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“Hear the parable of the sower” (Matt 13:18).

The familiar parable of the sower is the first parable Jesus tells in Matthew’s Gospel. This makes sense because it is a parable about parables, how to hear them and unpack their hidden meaning. Today’s Gospel passage is not the parable itself but an interpretation of the parable, identifying each element in the story and the message. Jesus’ disciples heard the actual parable with the crowd along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, and they asked him to explain it to them.

Jesus’ explanation focuses on the varying degrees of receptivity of the soil to the seed. This could suggest that his goal was to encourage disciples who had been sent out to share these same parables and came back feeling they had failed to reach their audiences. People didn’t listen, were easily distracted, got the story but missed the deeper meaning.

Jesus’ message to them was to preach generously, to broadcast the word without worrying about the results. Even if their words seemed to fall on deaf ears, the Word was still potent and would find good soil and multiply. It’s not about success, only being faithful. Do your part and God will take care of the rest.

Jesus often used the image of seeds in his parables. We hear about the power of the tiny mustard seed, the patience of farmers, the joy of the harvest, about weeds sown among wheat. Perhaps the most personal parable Jesus told as he approached

Jerusalem was the parable of the seed that falls to the ground and dies in order to rise again in abundance.

Jesus lived immersed in the natural world, its cycles and mysteries. Our technological advances and urban settings can deprive us of this organic grounding so rich in wisdom and realism. A passion for gardening and even cooking keeps many people connected to the therapeutic benefits of nature and provides the basis for a healthy spirituality linked to the planet, our common home.

Creation is the basis for every living thing, and this offers us a parable of immense importance today. Pope Francis made it his first task and highest priority when he produced his first major exhortation, *Laudato Si* (Praised Be) from the "Canticle" of St Francis of Assisi. Everything we need and cherish in the world came from the hand of God, as did we, created in the divine image.

We are sowers, seed and soil, givers and receivers of life, co-creators and partners with God and one another in this world. We are stewards of the garden our planet was meant to be for its inhabitants, human and otherwise. Jesus asks his disciples to be evangelists for the planet, laborers toward the harvest of hope that must sustain us as the fate of the earth is decided, perhaps by our own generation. If we listen and are faithful, with God's help we will also be successful.

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