

Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time  
July 10, 2011

Jesus often used images from nature like seed to get across his message. When Jesus preached and talked about how God's reign was in our midst, he seldom used abstract language. After all, he was talking to farmers, soldiers, women who made bread, and men who cast their nets into the sea. And so he used all the actions of these people in order to talk about God's reign.

Jesus preached the way his ancestors preached. He used not only the book of scriptures but the book of nature to talk about how God works in our midst. He preached like the poet Isaiah who lived in a time when people were terribly discouraged because they lived in exile in Babylon. Isaiah used nature to describe God's promises. Just as the rain and snow came down to water the parched land and make it fertile and fruitful, so, too, would God's promises be fulfilled and they would be led to a land of freedom.

You heard Jesus in the gospel today talk about a farmer sowing seeds. In this parable Jesus wanted to comfort the people the way his ancestor Isaiah had comforted the people of his day who were wondering where God was in the midst of their trials. Jesus said that despite the setbacks, God was at work and that eventually God's kingdom would break through. God was not like the idols of other gods who had mouths but didn't speak, who had ears but didn't listen, who had hands but never reached out to help. God was *with* the people and *for* the people and would never give up on anyone. God was like the farmer who never gave up despite the droughts, the poor topsoil, the rocks and thorns.

Using a mode of communication specifically designed to reach his audience, Jesus' parables were vivid stories that drew from everyday life – simple tales about farmers planting seeds, women sweeping their houses, a man being beaten by robbers – and easily understood stories from nature – a mustard seed, lilies, birds, clouds. Jesus spoke the language of the people of his time, used examples from their daily lives and offered it all in a mode they appreciated. He was not afraid of being seen as undignified by talking about commonplaces like mustard seeds or sheep. The Son of God did not see that as beneath him. And if he did not consider speaking in familiar styles as undignified, then why should we?

Jesus, after all, asked his followers to go to the ends of the earth, not just to places where they felt comfortable. And Jesus did not sit around in Capernaum waiting for people to come to him. Sometimes people came to the house where he was staying. More often, he went to them. And more important, Jesus spoke in a language that people understood and used media that people found accessible.

In every age the church has used whatever media were available to spread the good news. Jesus used parables drawn from nature and everyday life. St. Paul used letters to reach out to the early Christians. St. Augustine practically invented the form of the autobiography. The builders of the great medieval cathedrals used stone and stained glass. The Renaissance popes used colorful frescoes. Hildegard of Bingen, some say, wrote one of the first operas. St. Ignatius Loyola encouraged the early Jesuits to write and publish pamphlets. A Jesuit I know used theater to put on morality plays for Spanish-speaking parishioners in Yakima. Dorothy Day founded a newspaper. Daniel Lord jumped into radio. Bishop Fulton Sheen used television to stunning effect. Our own Father Treacy had a long-running program called Challenge on KOMO TV. And now we have bishops and priests and Catholic lay leaders, even Pope Benedict XVI, who blog and tweet.

No medium is beneath us when it comes to proclaiming the Gospel, especially to the young. This includes web sites, but also all social and digital media. How sad it would be if we did not use the latest tools available to us to communicate the word of God. If Jesus could talk about the birds of the air, then we can surely tweet.

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