

Archbishop Lori's Homily: Votive Mass of the Sacred Heart of Jesus

Knights of Columbus Board - Missouri State Officers

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A sure sign of spring in Mom and Dad's household was the arrival of the Burpee Seed catalogue. My Dad, an avid gardener, was a loyal customer. "The best seeds money can buy," he used to say. But it wasn't just the seeds that made Dad's garden a success. He also worked at it. Before the spring planting, he was out in the garden. If the ground had hardened due to lack of moisture, he watered and tilled it. If there were weeds, he removed them. If there were stones, he uprooted them and put them elsewhere. If he thought the soil needed to be enriched, he was on it. A lot of preparation took place before the seed ever went into the ground.

Dad monitored the progress of his garden daily. He did his best to ward off hungry birds, squirrels, and deer - (as well as inquisitive children such as me and my friends). Throughout the entire growing season he continued to tend the soil - to enrich and water it - to make sure that the conditions for growth were good.

His labors were rewarded with an abundance of garden-fresh vegetables & tomatoes. Most years there was enough for my Mom to can in Mason jars so that we could enjoy the fruits of Dad's gardening even in the winter months. As a result of Dad's hard work, I actually acquired a taste for vegetables.

In the Gospel just proclaimed, we hear once again the lesson that the seed of God's Word needs to be planted in good, rich soil. When I re-read that Gospel, I thought of Dad's efforts and gardening - and a lot of parallels came to mind that helped bring that Gospel alive for me - and, I hope for you.

For one thing, there is the quality of the seed. There's no doubt about it, the Burpee seeds Dad planted were of the best quality. Yet the quality of those seeds pales in comparison to the potential of the seed of God's Word planted in our hearts at

Baptism. There is nothing lacking or defective in the seed of the Divine Word. If allowed to grow in us, God's Word will produce superabundant fruit.

Then, there's the soil my Dad so carefully tended. In Jesus' parable, the soil is an image of our souls. Just as Dad had to clear, till, water, and nourish the soil of his garden, so too Jesus tells us we must tend and nourish the "soil" of our souls. In fact, Jesus' parable gives us an examination of conscience about the quality of the "soil" or "ground" of our souls.

Is it dry and hard due to a lack of prayer? Is it choked with the thorns and thistles of our daily preoccupations and desires? Is it stony due to our resentments, grudges, grasping, and jealousies? Is it less than fertile because of long-standing habits of sin? Just as Dad surveyed the quality of the soil before planting season, we must take an honest look at the condition of our souls.

If the quality of our inner soil is poor, then we must take remedial action first and foremost by making good use of the Sacrament of Reconciliation by which weeds of sin, the thorns of daily cares, & the stones of hatred are removed. In this Sacrament we "give God permission" to remove from our hearts whatever impedes the growth of his Word planted there in Baptism. Then we must water our souls with a daily regimen of prayer the centerpiece of which is the celebration of Sunday Mass in which our souls are nourished by Christ's Body and Blood. And if we really want the seed of God's Word to grow we will welcome God's love in our lives and share that love with others. Charity is like the sunlight which makes God's Word grow strong in us.

And what fruit can we expect once the seed of God's Word is planted in the fertile soil of our hearts? Will we not find ourselves keeping the Commandments in the spirit of the Beatitudes, that is to say, not as so many rules to be kept but rather as response of love to the God who has loved us first and best? And will we not find ourselves - in our daily work of heart and hand - producing the fruits of the Holy Spirit? - Namely - love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Such a yield, dear friends, is always in season!

May God bless us and keep us in his love. Vivat Jesus!