

16 Sexagesima Sunday

“A sower went out to sow his seed” (Lk. 8: 4 – 15)

In the parable of today’s gospel, Our Lord compares the Church to a field – sown with the seed of the Word of God; and he shows **three important reasons** why the Word of God, i. e: the teachings of Christ do **not** bear fruit in the hearts of men. The three reasons are the **world**, the **devil** and the **flesh!**

The seed sown in the field is the teaching of Jesus Christ. What exactly is that teaching? “**Do penance**” (Math. 4: 17). “From that time Jesus began to preach and to say: **Do penance, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.**”

But the demons who seek the ruin of men, try to take away the “teaching of penance” from the hearts of men, alluring them by **novel teachings** and seeming **miracles** performed by “false prophets.”

And those who show some good will to practice this “teaching of penance” and wish to reach the kingdom of heaven, are beset with **temptation of the flesh** from within.

Even among those who have decided to renounce their pleasures of flesh and professed to live a religious life, many are, in course of time, corrupted by the allurements of the **riches and pleasures** of the world from without.

As a result, we do not find, on the one hand, priests to preach penance, and on the other hand, we do not find people practicing penance, in order to produce good priests!

Yes, the doctrines of Faith and Morals, revealed in the bible and handed down by tradition; the commandments of God, the precepts of the Church, the sacraments and the rule of sanctity – are the good seeds to be sown by the priests of God, and by the divinely appointed and validly ordained ministers of the word of God!

This sowing of the seed has been done chiefly in two places – the **confessional** and the **pulpit**. In the confessional the sower scatters the good seed into each heart individually. And in the pulpit the seed is scattered over the multitude gathered.

In the parable of the sower there are **six things** for us to take note of: the **sower**, the **seed**, the **wayside**, the **stony ground**, the **thorns** and the **good soil**.

The sower stands both for Christ and for whoever preach Christ. **The seed** is God’s Word; the **wayside** stands for those who live for pleasure; the **stony ground**

symbolizes those who make a pretense of religious life; the **thorns** stand for the greedy and covetous; and the **good soil** for those who are really penitent and righteous.

The seed is the voice of the Son of God, who cried out: *Do penance, for the kingdom of God is at hand!* [Mt 4.17]

The Word of God sown in the heart of a sinner first produces the blade of **contrition**. Then comes the ‘ear’ which is **confession**. Confession lifts the soul by giving her the hope of forgiveness. Finally, the full corn of **satisfaction or reparation**.

And as he sowed, some fell by the wayside – the heart of the lustful.

But not everyone is faithful! Not everyone obeys the Gospel! That is why the parable continues: “*And as he sowed, some fell by the wayside; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it.*” [Lk 8.5]

The demons are also referred to as ‘fowls of the air’, because of their pride and because they are supposed to dwell in the air. They seize and devour the seed from the lustful hearts, lest it bear fruit. Hosea says: “*Strangers have devoured his strength*” [Hos 7.9] meaning that the **demons have eaten the strength of the divine word**. Notice also that the seed is said to have fallen by the wayside, because **the lustful man does not receive the word within his heart’s ear**, but as a mere sound that lightly passes by the ear of his body.

Such folk are the ‘dung-hold’ [Ps 82.11] which means ‘the fire of generation’, the heat of lust. From this dung **four worms** are generated, namely: simple fornication, adultery, incest, and sin against nature.

Simple fornication is a mortal sin between an unmarried man and an unmarried woman. It is called ‘fornication’ from *formae necatio*, the death of the soul made in the likeness of God.

Adultery (*alterius torum*) is the sin of approaching the marriage-bed of another.

Incest is sin between those closely related by blood or marriage.

Sin against nature refers to any act whereby illegal sexual pleasures is sought for either alone or with others.

All these are ‘the way trodden down by demons’, In them the seed of the divine word perishes and is snatched away by the devil.

And some fell upon a rock - The False Religious.

“And some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture.” [Lk 8.6]

The field is the Church, the **rock of the field** is the religious life founded upon the rock of faith, But alas! How many cracks, splits, divisions and dissensions are in the rock of religious life! If the seed of the divine word falls there, it bears no fruit because it does not have the **moisture of the Holy Ghost**, who does not dwell in the cracks of discord but in the habitations of unity. When the holy ghost descended upon Mary and the Apostles, *“They were of one heart and one soul,”* [Acts 4.32] says St Luke. Truly there are cracks where there is discord in Chapter of the monks, carelessness in choir, wantonness in the dormitory! How well the Lord says: *“And some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up it withered away,”* because (in St Matthew’s words) ***it had no root***, meaning **humility** which is the root of all virtues. See how obvious it is that divisions in religious life come from **pride of heart**! Without the root of humility, how can it bear fruit?

And some fell among thorns - The avaricious and usurers.

“And some fell among thorns, and the thorns growing up with it, choked it.” [Lk 8.7] Thorns and wild beasts have much in common! They both represent greedy and covetous people. **Avarice is like thorns** which catch, pierce and draw blood. **Covetousness is like a wild animal** that seizes and devours.

When the Lord says, *some fell among thorns*, he provides the clue himself: the thorns are riches, which catch a man and hold him back. Peter, so as not be caught and held in that way, told the Lord: *“Behold, we have left all things and followed thee.”* [Mt 19.27]

The devil stings man with the sting of avarice, so that he runs hither and thither to gather the thorns, those riches of which Isaiah says: *“As a bundle of thorns,”* [Is 33.12] The thorn pierces, and as it pierces it draws blood. The Lord says of such, *“Thorns sprang up and choked it.”* They choke the seed of God’s word, and the sacrifice of a broken heart.

And some fell on good ground – Good Christians

“Some fell on good ground, and being sprung up yielded fruit, some thirty-fold, some sixty-fold, some a hundred-fold.” [Lk 8.8]

You have seen, beloved Brethren, how **in** the above cases – (the wayside of the **lustful**, the stony ground of the **proud religious**, and the thorns of the **avaricious**) - the seed of God’s word could bear no fruit.

Note how well **the good ground** stands for **righteous and penitent souls**.

These are the **men** that bring forth fruit **thirty-fold and sixty-fold**. ‘Men’ stand for those who are both continent and active. They are truly ‘men’, using their reason. These submit themselves to the labour of the active life, exposing themselves to danger for their neighbor’s sake, preaching eternal life by word and example, watching over themselves and those in their care. These, in St Paul’s words, are *in labour and painfulness; in much watching; in hunger and thirst; in fasting often; in cold and nakedness*, etc. [2Cor 11.27]

The ‘**birds**’ represent **virgins and contemplatives**, who are lifted up on the wings of virtue, and contemplate *the King in his beauty*. These are taken up into the air (in mind rather than in body), rapt in contemplation to the third heaven, contemplating the glory of the Trinity in pureness of spirit, where they hear with the heart’s ear what they cannot express in words, or even comprehend with their mind. these are they that bear fruit a **hundred-fold**.

Let us pray that we may be made that good ground which is able to receive the word of God’s grace and to bear fruit, worthy of repentance.