

Fifteenth Sunday *per annum*
Year A, 2026

Is 55:10-11

Rom 8:18-23

Ps 65

Mt 13:1-23

The Word of God

There is no hiding the “theme” in the readings from scripture given to us today for prayerful consideration: it is the word of God. From the prophet Isaiah we learn that God’s Word accomplishes his will and returns to him victorious. The Word that goes forth from God’s mouth does his will and achieves the purpose for which it was sent.

Now, we might ask, what is that purpose?

To begin to sketch an answer that question, we can look to Jesus’s explanation of the parable of the seed and the sower. Jesus, like the prophets before him, is a sower of the Word of God. But even more, Jesus himself is the living and eternal Word of God, according to the opening verse of the gospel of John: *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”* Jesus is the Word made flesh: *“And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father’s only Son, full of grace and truth”* (Jn 1:14).

As Jesus explains the parable, we can begin to discern the purpose of the Word of God, which is always effective. When the seed, which is the Word, falls upon rich soil, it bears fruit, because it is well received. Here, the Word is heard, understood, accepted ... and in that soil of glad acceptance, the Word begins to change and

to develop into something that gives glory to God. It bears fruit. The Word of God, when well received, bears fruit. Here, the Word of God has served its purpose: it has brought life, growth, and abundance.

In the other three cases – when the seed falls on the path, or on rocky ground, or among thorns – it bears no fruit. For different reasons, these different grounds fail to receive well the seed that is sown, the Word of God, the Word of Life. Still, in each case the Word of God achieves the purpose for which it was sent: here to show the barrenness of the path, the rocky ground, and the thorny ground.

Now according to the parable, each of the three grounds that do not accept the Word represents *“one who hears the word”* but for some reason fails to respond accordingly. They heard, but they did not respond well. They heard, but they did not act. They heard, but ... fill in whatever excuse or pretext. According to Jesus’s parable, there can be no protest of ignorance, no claim that one was not informed or didn’t get the message: they heard.

You see, the Word that goes forth from the mouth of God does not return to him void and empty. It is a blessing for those who receive it; a curse for those who reject it. So let’s not reject it.

One of the points of this parable is that there will be a reckoning for how the world either receives or rejects the Word of God, the

Logos, which is God himself, how I receive or reject the Word of God.

The purpose of the Word of God is to reveal. By his Word, God reveals himself to the world. And by his Word, God reveals world's acceptance or rejection of him. This is why the Word of God cannot return to him empty: it always achieves the end for which he sent it. The Word reveals. It reveals the God who speaks it; it reveals the minds and hearts of those to whom it is spoken.

To more fully grasp the sense of this, listen to these various passages from scripture, which point to this revelatory purpose and power of the Word of God:

"Indeed, the word of God is living and effective, sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating even between soul and spirit, joints and marrow, and able to discern reflections and thoughts of the heart. No creature is concealed from him, but everything is naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must render an account" (Heb 4:12-13).

It is *"God who knows the secrets of the heart"* (Ps 44:22b).

"Lord, you have probed me, you know me: you know when I sit and stand; you understand my thoughts from afar" (Ps 139:1-2).

Finally, the prophecy of Simeon concerning the child Jesus: *"Behold, this child is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be contradicted ... so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed" (Lk 1:34-35).*

The unenviable role of the prophet is sometimes to confirm people in their resistance, to make manifest their rejection of God's Word, to lay bare the rebellion of their hearts, to provoke them into revealing whom they really serve: if not God, then the evil one, or themselves and their own security, safety, or creature-comfort. The prophet is seldom thanked for sowing God's Word, especially by those who would rather be ignorant of that Word.

When his disciples, perplexed, question Jesus saying "*Why do you speak to [the crowds] in parables?*," he answers with words that are, I admit, hard to hear, hard to understand. Jesus says that he speaks in parables precisely to obscure the meaning of his message from certain people, from those who look but do not see, hear but do not listen or understand. Jesus tries to get his disciples to understand that part of his purpose as the incarnate Word of God is to penetrate hearts so as to reveal their innermost thoughts, their deepest will: whether to accept the Word of God or to reject it.

To explain his purpose as the Word of God, Jesus, in answer to his disciples' question, quotes the prophet Isaiah, who centuries before had spoken the Word of God in a way that cuts to the quick:

You shall indeed hear but not understand, you shall indeed look but never see. Gross is the heart of this people, they will hardly hear with their ears, they have closed their eyes, lest they see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their hearts and be converted, and I heal them.

Do you understand what Jesus means by quoting this passage from Isaiah? *Gross is the heart of this people*, meaning stubborn, dull, calloused, hardened, closed, fat and heavy, without feeling, without sense or sensitivity. This is the prophetic diagnosis for the refusal of God's Word. It is a diagnosis and an indictment.

"If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts" as your ancestors did in the wilderness, when at Meribah and Massah, they challenged me and provoked me, though they had seen my works (Ps 95:7-9).

They had seen. They had heard. And yet their hearts remained hardened ... like the ground on the path, like the rocky soil, like the thorny ground. What's more, such hearts are so sclerotic and impervious to change – that is, to conversion, metanoia – that *they want* not to hear, not to see, not to understand. Such hearts want to remain unconverted, unhealed, and therefore unredeemed, unsaved. The light comes into the world, and they prefer darkness to light. Truth comes into the world, and they prefer error to truth. Life comes into the world, and they prefer death to life. The way comes into the world, and they prefer to wander lost. They would rather remain in their sin – wayward, wrong, and lifeless – than to be freed from it (see Jn 3:19-20). This diagnosis is devastating and damning.

In light of all this, we might "zoom out" a bit and ask ourselves a question or two. What is my relationship to the Word of God like? Do I open the bible and read the scriptures? Do I engage the

scriptures in prayer and study? Why not? Maybe I tell myself that the scriptures are too hard to understand, too complicated, too boring. This is only a pretext. If I but take and read, I'll understand plenty enough. I can rely on the notes in my bible to help me understand. I can read the bible devotionally, like Christians have done for hundreds of years. I don't have to be a theologian or biblical scholar to read the bible. I just have to take and read.

Maybe the real reason I don't read the Word of God is that I don't want to be confronted with realities and truths that would inconvenience me. Maybe my heart is "*gross*" in that way. Maybe the ground in my heart and soul is not ready, unwilling to receive the seed of the Word. Am I a hardened path, a rocky soil, a thorny ground? Do I want not to change? Do I cling to categories and mindsets that I suspect are at odds with the Word of God and don't want to be confronted with my own fears, prejudices, stubbornness, or lack of compassion? I am really so hardheaded and hardhearted that I would risk eternal salvation by clinging to my ways instead of being converted to God's ways?

Standing before you as your priest, your pastor, I claim no particular moral or spiritual high ground here, no special virtue. These are questions that I myself have wrestled with over the years. The Word of God, at least in my life, challenges me constantly, daily even. Over the years I have come to shed, discard, leave off, even repudiate many of my former ways of thinking, my former opinions and positions, my former alignments and

allegiances simply because I encountered in the scriptures the goodness and truth of the Word of God. This has never been easy work. It involves dying to myself so that Christ can live in me (Gal 2:20). I must decrease so that he can increase (Jn 3:30).

All the same, I thank God for this, for his patience toward me, as I work, sometimes reluctantly or grudgingly, to allow his Spirit to take possession of me in the depths of my being, and there to prepare for himself a rich soil, so that his Word might find ready welcome in me.

I leave you with a light paraphrase of the well-known passage from the Confessions of St Augustine:

Late have I loved you, O [Word of God] ever ancient, ever new, late have I loved you! You were within me, but I was outside, and it was there that I searched for you. In my unloveliness I plunged into the lovely things that you created. You were with me, but I was not with you. Created things kept me from you; yet if they had not been in you, they would have not been at all. You called, you shouted, and you broke through my deafness. You flashed, you shone, and you dispelled my blindness. You breathed your fragrance on me; I drew in breath and now I gasp for you. I have tasted you, now I hunger and thirst for more. You touched me, [healed me], and [now I burn] for your peace.

Word of God reveal yourself to me, and let me see, hear, understand, so that I might find my purpose in you, O eternal and everlasting Word of Life. Amen.