

## SEXAGESIMA 2017

### SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH

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**2 COR. 11.19 ST. LUKE 8.4**



When I was a little boy I lived in the small farming town of Hereford, Texas. My grandmother had a summer garden...most of our fruits and vegetables came from the garden. What didn't get eaten right away...my grandmother canned for the cold winter months.

It takes good seed, good soil and the right amount of rain and sunshine to make a healthy garden. My grandmother also knew the right time to plant and the right time to harvest...she knew exactly when the fruits and vegetables were ripe. She also took care of the garden...kept it free of weeds...and tried to keep the birds away.

Jesus did much of his teaching in short stories called parables. Parables are based on familiar subjects that teach us important lessons. We read many of them at Sunday Mass during the Church Year:

- *The Good Samaritan*
- *The Wedding Banquet*
- *The Lost Sheep*
- *The Wasteful (Prodigal) Son*
- *The Workers in the Vineyard*

Today's Gospel is another of Jesus' short stories with an agricultural theme...*The Parable of the Sower (and the Seeds)*. The story goes like this:

*There was a man who went out to plant seeds in his garden. Some fell on a well-traveled path and was eaten by birds...never had a chance to grow. Some fell on rocky ground where the soil was not deep enough to hold moisture...never had a chance to grow. Some fell where thorny bushes grew and had the life choked out of them...never had a chance to grow. Some fell on good ground...and the plants grew and prospered.*

Jesus concluded the story by saying, "Listen, then, if you have ears!" Listen...Jesus tells us...and understand the story.

We should not spend time analyzing every element of the story...we run the risk of missing the message entirely. Like last week's story of the *Workers in the Vineyard*...this is a story about "God's Kingdom"...and the Church's work...our own work...in spreading the Good News. Some people listen and respond...some don't.

The disciples asked Jesus to explain the meaning of the parable so they could understand. He prefaces his explanation by telling them they have already been given the "secrets" of God's Kingdom...but others get taught through parables...they have eyes but can't see...they have ears but can't hear.

Jesus is saying we must understand the parables in order to understand him. There are no secret messages in the parables. Open hearts and minds will get the meaning of what Jesus is saying. The parables are ultimately about how we respond to what Jesus says about himself.

God never stacks the decks against us...he doesn't make it impossible for us to see and hear. But we do have free will. We have the choice to accept or reject the Good News about Jesus. We have the ability to make our eyes so they can't see and our ears so they can't hear.

Saint Paul wrote many letters to churches telling them the Good News about Jesus. Not everyone got the message and we can sense his frustration...especially when those within the Church actively worked against him. He did his best to get people to stop sneaky and secretive behavior and to maintain peace within the Church...but some insisted on playing like they were blind and deaf.

We don't live in a primarily agricultural society but the message of today's Gospel speaks to us today just as it did to the crowd of people who heard it directly from Jesus' mouth 2000 years ago.

My grandmother planted a summer garden every year but she knew even with the right amount of water, sun and constant care, the results of her hard work might be mixed. The fruits and vegetables might be great one year...they might not be so great the following year.

Our work is God's work. We are all in the business of sharing the Good News about Jesus with others. We also know from experience our work comes with both failures and successes. We should not become discouraged.

We must be persistent in our work...so those who have eyes may see and those who have ears may hear...until we see our work grow and prosper.

