

Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time - Lectionary: 103

Reading 1 - [Isaiah 55:10-11](#)

Thus says the LORD: Just as from the heavens the rain and snow come down and do not return there till they have watered the earth, making it fertile and fruitful, giving seed to the one who sows and bread to the one who eats, so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; my word shall not return to me void, but shall do my will, achieving the end for which I sent it.

Responsorial Psalm - [Psalm 65:10, 11, 12-13, 14](#) R. (Lk 8:8) The seed that falls on good ground will yield a fruitful harvest.

Reading 2 - [Romans 8:18-23](#)

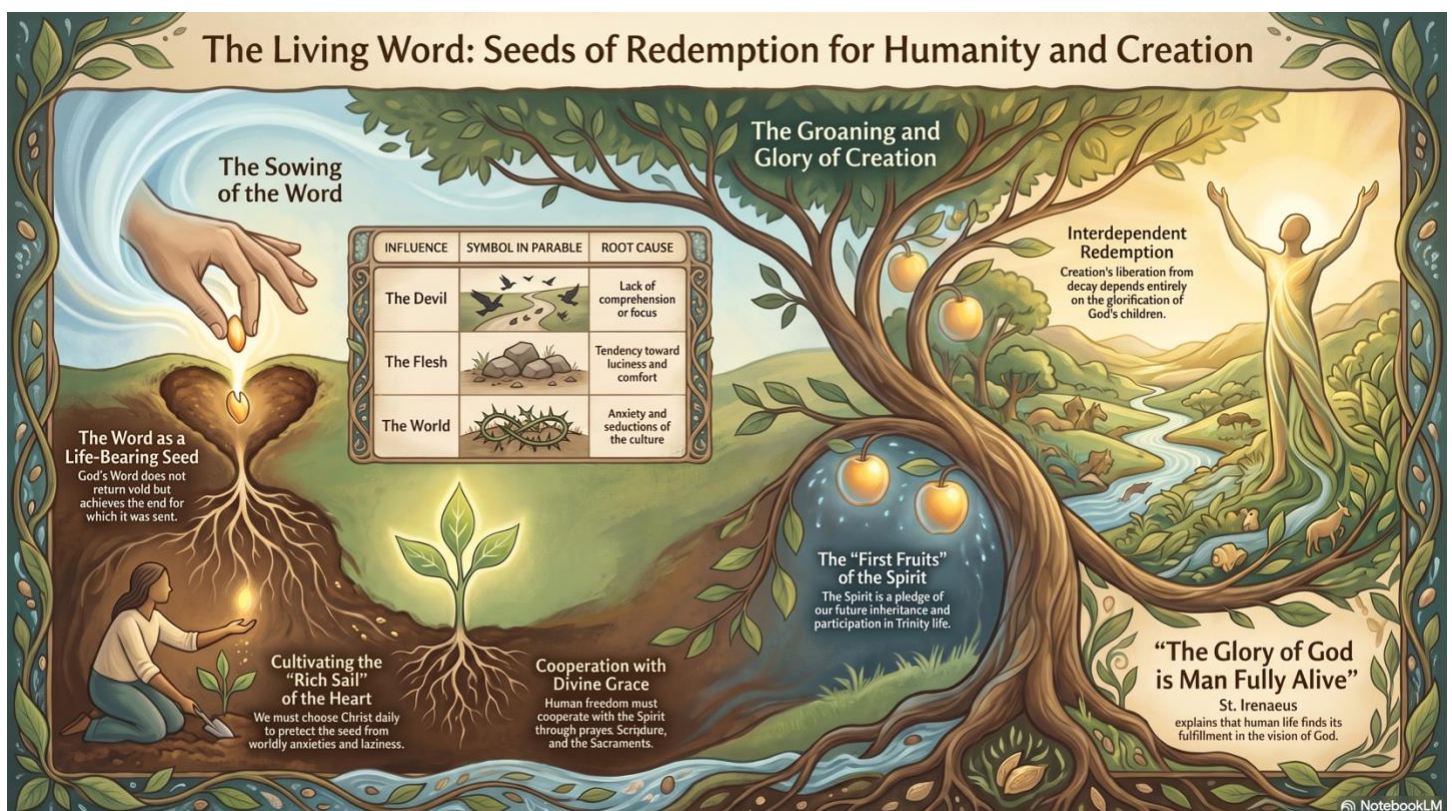
Brothers and sisters: I consider that the sufferings of this present time are as nothing compared with the glory to be revealed for us. For creation awaits with eager expectation the revelation of the children of God; for creation was made subject to futility, not of its own accord but because of the one who subjected it, in hope that creation itself would be set free from slavery to corruption and share in the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that all creation is groaning in labor pains even until now; and not only that, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, we also groan within ourselves as we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.

Gospel - [Matthew 13:1-9](#)

On that day, Jesus went out of the house and sat down by the sea. Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat down, and the whole crowd stood along the shore. And he spoke to them at length in parables, saying: "A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky ground, where it had little soil. It sprang up at once because the soil was not deep, and when the sun rose it was scorched, and it withered for lack of roots. Some seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it. But some seed fell on rich soil and produced fruit, a hundred or sixty or thirtyfold. Whoever has ears ought to hear."

Summary

The homily is centered on the transformative power of the Word of God and its role in the redemption of both humanity and the natural world. Drawing from Isaiah, Romans, and the Gospel of Matthew, I argue that the Word is a "doing word"—a creative force that fulfills the divine will. Central to this synthesis is the interdependence of humankind and nature: the "futility" and corruption currently observed in the physical world are viewed as direct consequences of human brokenness and original sin. The homily emphasizes that while redemption is initiated through the "first fruits" of the Holy Spirit and the adoption of believers, its full realization remains a future eschatological event—the "redemption of our bodies." This process requires active human cooperation with grace, the conscious exercise of freedom against the "hidden cancer of routine," and a recognition that the ultimate glorification of humanity is the catalyst for the liberation of all creation from decay. St. Paul's assertion in Romans 8—that present sufferings are "as nothing" compared to the glory to be revealed—is presented as a message of hope. By offering suffering in union with Christ, the "children of God" participate in the salvific work that will ultimately lead to the transformation and glorification of the entire created order.



The Stewardship of Creation & The Salvation of Man

Last week we explored the meaning of the ethical / moral aspirations born of the faith foundations of those whose actions intentionally resulted in a new country 250 years ago and wove them into an ideal for its national identity. Central to those aspirations and identity was a basic understanding of the nature of the human person and therefore the freedom they ought to possess and protect as well as the source from which the aspirations, identity, and freedom come. In accord with the Catholic and to some degree other Christian teachings, we reflected on the brokenness of the human condition, its source, and how that brokenness impacts the ability to pursue the goods of life, liberty, and happiness in civil society – achieving the ideal they hoped to be achieved. The concluding emphasis was that any hope for an authentically human civil environment which allows for authentic human flourishing, in effect building the Kingdom of God here, can only be possible because of and in Christ and therefore the Church.

This week we are invited to explore the means by which this authentic human flourishing can be realized. Specifically, how our creator intended human communion is effected through our redemption and the subsequent restoration of our communion with God. The Word that goes forth from the mouth of God is Jesus, truly the Word of God that comes down from heaven.¹ Jesus does the will of the Father and does not return to the Father without having achieved that for which he was sent. To that end, the readings for this Sunday emphasize the central role and importance of the living Word of God, the importance of the sowing of the seed of God's Word (freely receiving Jesus) in us, by God, as well as its (His) guaranteed ability to produce what it signifies², thereby freeing us to possess the peace that surpasses understanding. To understand this as a defining aspect of our identity and to live accordingly in this peace. They also convey the role of the Holy Spirit in making this possible and, who is indispensable to our growth in virtue that allows us to attain eternal life.

In the whole of Scripture, God's word is not just a spoken word. It is a 'doing word'—a creating, life-giving word. It is like a life-bearing seed. As Isaiah says in the first reading; *"so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose and succeed in the thing for which I sent it."* There is only one in whom God's word is most perfectly embodied and clearly experienced, and that is in Jesus Christ who is the Word of God. Everything that Jesus said, everything that Jesus did, was God communicating to us through him. Not just his teaching, but his whole life, from the hidden years of Nazareth through his public life to his death and resurrection—in all of this Jesus was, and is for us today, the Word of God. As well, if we are sufficiently sensitive, we encounter it unceasingly in every experience of our lives, whether that experience is joyful or sad, a success or a failure, pleasant or painful. Like the tiny mustard seed, like the small amount of yeast in a large batch of dough, the seed—the Word of God—begins to grow and flourish within us.

God uses these agricultural references to help us understand the work of redemption God desires to do for us and by extension for all creation. Our redemption results in both human beings and the earth becoming 'fertile and fruitful' according to the intentions of God from the beginning. The psalmist praises the Lord for His bountiful harvest, recognizing the necessity and generosity of God which is essential to the fruitfulness of the labor of farmers and therefore sings God's praises. This fertile field is also associated with God's people themselves. The field planted with grain is an image of God's people rooted in the Word of God which is the Son. As Christians, we are the first fruits that are growing towards eternal life by the Spirit. When we understand these truths, then it becomes possible to understand suffering as a redemptive part of mission fulfillment. This is what St. Irenaeus meant when he said,

Thus from the beginning the Son is the Revealer of the Father, since from the beginning he was with the Father: prophetic visions, diversities of gifts, his ministries, the glorification of the Father, he has shown forth all that to men for their benefit at the right time, like a well-composed and harmonious melody. Where there is composition there is melody; where there is melody it is at the right time; where there is the right time, there is benefit. And because the Word became the dispenser of the Father's grace for the benefit of the men for whom he made such great "economies", he showed God to man and man to God, preserving the invisibility of the Father so that man would not become a despiser of God but would always have a goal toward which to advance, and at the same time making God visible to men through his many "economies" so that man might not be totally deprived of God and perish. For the glory of God is the living man, and the life of man is the vision of God. If the revelation of God by the creation already gives life to all the beings living on earth, how much more does the manifestation of the Father by the Word give life to those who see God!³

¹ John 1:1-30

² Clergy, Sacred Congregation for the. *General Catechetical Directory*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1971.

³ Irenaeus, Adv. Haer. 4.20.7, trans. Robert M. Grant, Irenaeus of Lyons

In Eucharistic Prayer IV you hear the priest pray these words, “*he sent the Holy Spirit from you, Father, as the first fruits for those who believe, so that, bringing to perfection his work in the world, he might sanctify creation to the full.*”⁴ At this moment the Church is praying in recognition that the Holy Spirit was sent by the Father (through the Son) as God’s initial gift and guarantee of the salvation and sanctification that Christ brings.⁵ In Catholic teaching, “first fruits” language is used for what is already real now, but is still only the beginning of the fullness that will be completed later.⁶ The Catechism explains it this way, that the Holy Spirit gives believers the pledge or first fruits of our inheritance—namely, participation in “*the very life of the Holy Trinity.*” The phrase “*for those who believe*” indicates that this gift is received in faith—faith that the Holy Spirit awakens and makes possible.⁷ Therefore our life lived in the Spirit will lead us to increasingly reject false love so that “*by this power we can bear much fruit.*”⁸ Christ’s saving work reaches us through the gift of the Holy Spirit and this saving / sanctifying action bears fruit in us as “*perfections*” the Spirit forms in us as “*the first fruits of eternal glory.*”⁹

This is a message of hope from God, that St. Paul is sharing. Recalling to mind again the words of St. Irenaeus, paraphrased; “*the glory of God is man fully alive, and man is fully alive in the glory of heaven*”, though as St. John says, “*beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.*”¹⁰ We know that this glory of heaven is God’s unveiled divine radiance and majesty, and our blessed participation in it—the beatific vision and eternal happiness, which is far greater than any suffering we may experience in our earthly lives. Though we may suffer, we can offer our sufferings in union with Christ’s salvific work of redemption in anticipation of the promise. “*Creation awaits with eager expectation the revelation of the children of God because creation was made subject to futility, not of its own accord but because of the one who subjected it, in hope that creation itself would be set free from slavery to corruption and share in the glorious freedom of the children of God.*”¹¹ The suffering of the children of God plays a role in the glorification of the entirety of creation.¹²

The Gospel reading brings us back to the central need for redemption, ours, and through us, all creation. In the parable itself, the emphasis is on Jesus as the one who is sowing seed, who works and produces results. The parable has strong links with the First Reading from Isaiah. In both we are told that God shares his abundance with us and his plans will not be frustrated. This is clearly a message of hope for communities which may at times be discouraged by the meagre results of their personal efforts to grow in holiness and / or their evangelization efforts. Of the important truths, one important truth this parable teaches is that our freedom doesn't operate in a vacuum. We truly are free to choose to follow Christ or not follow Christ, but outside factors influence that freedom, trying to get us to choose a self-centered life over a Christ-centered life. The first influence is the devil, represented by the birds that eat the seed of the path. The second influence is our own tendency to laziness and comfort, what St Paul calls “the flesh.” The third influence is the culture around us, which is a product of fallen human nature.

The subjection of creation to frustration traces back indirectly to God’s judgment following transgression through the loss of the grace that once ordered all things toward their proper end.¹³ The inevitable outcome

⁴ https://ibreviary.com/m2/messale.php?s=preghiera_eucaristica&id=75

⁵ The Roman Missal (English Translation According to the Third Typical Edition), The Order of Mass

⁶ General Audience of 20 May 1998, 3.

⁷ CCC, 683.

⁸ Catechism of the Catholic Church, 735-736.

⁹ Ibid., 1832.

¹⁰ 1 John 3:2

¹¹ Romans 8:18-25

¹² John A. Kincaid and Michael Patrick Barber, “‘Conformed to the Image of His Son’: Participation in Christ as Divine Sonship in Romans 8,” *Letter & Spirit: Christ Our Passover* (2015), 10:59–60.

¹³ Saint Thomas Aquinas, Fathers of the English Dominican Province, *Summa Contra Gentiles* (London: Burns Oates & Washbourne, 1924), 5:192–193

of humanity's severed relationship with the supernatural principle that sustained creation's integrity. Both moral and natural evils resulted from the original sin, corrupting not only the soul but also the body and indeed the very stuff of earth from which they were made.¹⁴ Without original sin, creation would presumably operate under different conditions.

However, rather than being a permanent condition, the present groans of creation underscore its future status intertwined with that of the children of God; creation's liberation depends on humanity's glorification. The "*revelation of the children of God*" refers to believers being fully manifested in their transformed glory. When believers are finally revealed in their full divine sonship—transformed and glorified—creation itself will simultaneously be freed from decay and share in that same glorious freedom. As we pray in Eucharistic Prayer IV, "*there, with the whole of creation, freed from the corruption of sin and death, may we glorify you through Christ our Lord, through whom you bestow on the world all that is good.*"¹⁵ This revelation encompasses not only a future eschatological act but also the permanent manifestation of Christians as God's children through deeds confirming this status, which directly influences the entire creation—precisely what creation longs for.¹⁶ Creation's eager expectation is thus not passive waiting but an active longing for the moment when God's redemptive plan reaches completion through the transformation of His children.

St. Thomas Aquinas grounds the natural evils in the loss of grace that originally sustained human nature. The defects resulting from this privation of grace took the form of sin, making them both culpable in reference to their first principle, which was Adam's sin, and natural, in reference to nature already destitute. Original sin thus operates as a formal cause—it corrupts human nature itself—while natural evils flow as consequences from that corruption. When Adam sinned, humanity was deprived of the supernatural assistance that God had bestowed and intended to transmit through generation. This deprivation becomes the indirect mechanism through which defects enter the created order.¹⁷ He distinguishes between the *existence* of natural processes and their *character as evils*. Earthquakes and similar phenomena are part of creation's natural order. What original sin affects is humanity's relationship to these phenomena and creation's subjection to futility and decay. The deprivation of the supernatural grace that once sustained human nature creates a condition in which the created order operates under diminishment—subject to corruption, suffering, and disorder. The natural world's subjection to decay and its capacity to cause harm are consequences of humanity's severed relationship with the divine principle that once ordered creation toward its proper end.

Jesus truly is the Lord, but he refuses to bully us into following him. In his wisdom, God created us with free will. He gives us the seed of a meaningful, fruitful, and truly happy life by offering us his friendship, but it's up to us to ensure that the seed is planted in good soil, and to keep the soil good. Christ also helps us to understand ourselves and the environment of our hearts and minds by explaining the parable of seeds. The first seed that Christ mentions is the seed that falls on the path and is eaten by a bird. Jesus explains that this seed represents those who hear the Gospel but do not comprehend it. The second seed, the seed on the rocky soil, is represents the person who receives the Word but shrinks in persecution. The seed in the thorns is the person who is caught up in worldly anxieties that choke and hinder its ability to bear fruit. Lastly, Christ describes the seed in the rich soil as the person who hears, receives, and bears fruit from the Word of God. In His parable, Christ instructs us to be careful where we are planted and what we surround ourselves with. Christ uses the analogy of fruit because fruit means virtue and evangelism in the

¹⁴ Leroy A. Huizenga, *Behold the Christ: Proclaiming the Gospel of Matthew* (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Road Publishing, 2019), 27.

¹⁵ https://ibreviary.com/m2/messale.php?s=preghiera_eucaristica&id=75

¹⁶ Daniel Patte and Vasile Mihoc, eds., "Humankind and Creation as Interdependent," in *Greek Patristic and Eastern Orthodox Interpretations of Romans, Romans through History and Cultures* (London; New Delhi; New York; Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2013), 9:162–163.

¹⁷ Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Fathers of the English Dominican Province, Summa Contra Gentiles* (London: Burns Oates & Washbourne, 1924), 5:192–193

New Testament. He encourages His followers to live virtuously and bring others to God by being rooted in His Word.

It's up to us to choose each day to follow Christ's voice in our hearts, not the lies of the devil, the sighs of our laziness, or the seductions of the world around us. He is the "sower" of the parable, spreading God's Word and announcing God's invitation, but never forcing hearts to welcome it. Jesus always respects our freedom, but he never gives up on convincing us to use that freedom well. We must also view our progress in holiness with a merciful disposition in imitation of Christ's love for us, since even Jesus' closest disciples did not provide, at first, very promising soil. Without the help of God's grace, our freedom cannot long resist the influence of the devil, the world, and the flesh. And yet, God's grace doesn't make us into saints unless we cooperate with it.

There are two ways we can cooperate with God's grace. First, we can use well of the gifts God has given us as channels of grace: the sacraments, the Bible, the teachings of the Church, the example and intercession of the saints, and, most importantly of all, the gift of prayer. Second, we can exercise our freedom, just as we exercise our muscles. This means making conscious choices, motivated by worthy reasons, the proper operation of intellect and will, properly ordered. The husband and father who goes to work every day for years just out of routine and doesn't consciously renew each day his commitment to glorify God in his work, to his family and to the common good, the reasons behind his going to work, will eventually face an existential crisis. The Christian who comes to Mass every Sunday for years just out of routine but doesn't consciously renew their personal commitment to Jesus Christ each Sunday, which is the reason behind coming to Mass, will eventually drift away from God. We must know the reasons behind our choices, and we must consciously renew our commitment to those reasons which we determine with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, are good. That's how we exercise our freedom and defend ourselves against the hidden cancer of routine - the secret ally of the devil, the world, and the flesh.

Glossary of Key Terms

Term	Definition
Adoption	The process, begun by the Holy Spirit through justification, by which believers become children of God; it is brought to fulfillment when the body is glorified.
Beatific Vision	The direct perception and vision of God in heaven, which constitutes the eternal happiness and life of man.
Creation's Groaning	A metaphor for the active longing and "labor pains" of the natural world as it awaits liberation from corruption and its future transformation alongside humanity.
Eschatological	Relating to the final stage of God's plan for humanity, encompassing the end of time, the resurrection of the body, and the full revelation of God's kingdom.
First Fruits	A term used for a reality that is already present (the Holy Spirit in the believer) but serves as a pledge or "down payment" for the fullness of salvation to come.
Formal Cause	In the context of St. Thomas Aquinas's thought, the role of original sin in corrupting the very nature of humanity, leading to natural and moral defects.
Futility (Subjection to)	The state of frustration and decay to which creation was subjected following human transgression and the subsequent loss of ordering grace.

The Flesh	A term used by St. Paul to describe the human tendency toward laziness, comfort, and self-centeredness, which acts as an internal influence against spiritual growth.
Parable	A short, natural story used by Jesus (such as the Sower) to communicate deep spiritual truths about the Kingdom of God and the human heart.
Redemption of the Body	The final deliverance from corruption and death, occurring when the body and soul are reunited in a glorified state at the end of time.
Word of God	Not merely a spoken word, but a "doing word" that creates and gives life; most perfectly embodied in the person, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.