

HOMILY ON THE 4TH SUNDAY OF LUKE

Father Filip Lommaert

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In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Today, we listened to the Holy Gospel of Saint Luke where Christ tells his disciples the parable of the sower. The sower, who went out to sow the seed, the Word of God. This parable can also be found in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark.

Let there be no doubt about it: the sower mentioned in this parable is Christ, our Lord and Saviour.

We hear that four groups of people were granted the Word of Life. But, only one group actually received it.

Let us now have a closer look at these four groups, of which only one will receive the Word of God, and start with the ones who miss out on receiving the Word of God.

“Some fell by the wayside, it was trampled down and the birds of the air devoured it.”

Here, the birds of the air do not represent birds as we know. They represent the demons of the air. Those demons are able to devour the Word of God from the hearts of the people. This is because those demons have hearts that are hard and merciless, and they trample on the seed of God. Let us not forget though, that those demons can only do this if we allow them. If we do not allow them, they can do nothing.

“Some fell on rock, and as soon as it sprang up, it withered away because it lacked moisture.”

This is the seed that fails to develop among people who only have a superficial interest in the things of God. These are the people who consider faith to be just a pastime, a hobby, or a tradition that they feel bound by. They can be overcome with emotion and excitement about their faith, but their faith is like fireworks; there is a big bang and then it quickly fizzles out. They are unable to feed and nourish the Holy Spirit. Their enthusiasm is just that, a temporary thing, nothing more. It does not get transformed into faith. At the first sign of an obstacle, temptation or difficulty, their enthusiasm vanishes and they walk away from their faith.

“And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up with it and choked it.”

The thorns here represent the passions and the cares of this world, complete with all their riches and pleasures. Nowadays many, many people have souls that are full to the rim with earthly passions and cares. Temptation is everywhere, 24 hours a day, but if we want to make our faith our priority, we have to resist. If you only live for those passions and earthly cares, you will never be able to bring your faith to perfection, it will remain undeveloped.

Some think that they can make their passions and earthly cares are their priority, and not their faith. They try to combine their faith with those passions and cares, but we all know that this is doomed to fail. You cannot worship God and Mammon at the same time.

Saint John of Kronstadt had the following to say in his book, 'My Life in Christ': "How we cling to earthly things! We do not wish to devote even one hour exclusively to God.

Even during the divine liturgy we allow ourselves to think and dream of earthly things and fill our souls with images and desires of earthly things, sometimes, alas, even with impure images – when we ought to be praying ardently, to be meditating assiduously upon this great mystery, to be repenting for our sins, longing and praying to be cleansed, hallowed, enlightened, renewed and strengthened in the Christian life, and in the fulfilment of Christ's commandments; when we ought to be praying for the living and the dead, for the liturgy is a sacrifice of thanksgiving and propitiation, of praise and prayer.”

“But others fell on good ground, sprang up, and yielded a crop a hundredfold.”

These are the people Our Lord Jesus Christ is looking for. They are the people who will not allow the demons to enter their hearts. They are the people who do not consider their faith to be a pastime. They are the people who do not give up at the first sight of an obstacle, temptation, or difficulty. They are the people who do not just live for their worldly passions and cares.

But how can we become part of this fourth group, this group who will cultivate the seed of God and avoid becoming part of one of the first three groups.

The answer is given in today's gospel.

First of all, if we want to ensure that the seed of God does not fall by the wayside and does not get trampled down or does not get devoured by the demons, we must have an **'honest and good heart'**. We must not be hard and harsh. We must not make dishonest excuses for our failings, we must not do evil; we must be honest and good in our hearts.

Secondly, if we do not want to fall into careless excitement, we must cultivate the seed of God, we must treat it like any seed we want to see grow tall and

strong. We must give moisture to it, so that it grows roots and develops, in other words, we must **'hear the word and keep it'**. We need to obey the commandments of God.

Thirdly, in order to prevent the seed of God getting choked with the thorns of our passions and cares, we must **'bear fruit with patience'**. Like all good things, this takes time. There is an English proverb that says: "the best things come to those that wait."

Also, as most gardeners will know, it takes a lot of patience, hard work and perseverance to grow strong and healthy fruit, vegetables and plants. So, we also have to be patient and not give up easily, but slowly and assuredly live our faith as a way of life.

But there is one more lesson Christ, our Saviour gives to the Apostles. He reminds them that the Kingdom of God is coming. And that His Kingdom is coming, regardless of whether we see it coming or not, and regardless of whether we prepare for it or not. Maybe we are too blind to see it, but we are not given a choice here, we **MUST** see the Truth and the power of the Truth.

Once we are prepared to see the Truth, we must take the next step. And this next step is to listen. Only by listening can we acknowledge the Truth and hear what our Lord is telling us about His nearness to us. Hearing and listening are extremely important and critical for us Orthodox Christians.

Thus, when our Lord and Saviour says: **"Take heed then how you hear..."** He means that we are responsible not only for the faithfulness of our actions, but also for the accuracy of our hearing and the truth of our understanding.

When the day of the Final Judgment comes, "I did not know" will not be enough to escape the Final Judgment. That is why Christ is warning his disciples and He is telling them to be very careful, so that through them others might hear the Word.

Theirs is an Apostolic mission! Because, if they do not approach this mission with the seriousness it requires, they themselves might end up not understanding the Word of God.

"Take heed then how you hear; for to him who has more will be given, and from him who has not, even what he thinks he has will be taken away (Luke 8:18)." These words of Christ to the disciples, urges them to lead a very strict life and to have great personal integrity, because they will be seen by all, and hence judged by all.

They will be judged by others on how they teach and preach the Divine Word of God. If a disciple has zeal for the Word and is diligent he will be given great Grace from God. If a disciple has no zeal for the Word of God and no diligence he will lose even the Grace he appears to have received from God.

Today we also commemorate the Fathers of the 7th Ecumenical Council in Nicaea in AD 787, who restored the use and veneration of icons, following the iconoclast period. Today, we honour, as we do every year, those who sacrificed everything for the truth of the Gospel. Some even gave their lives for the Word of God, during this period.

Those who opposed the Fathers of the 7th Ecumenical Council and battled against the use of icons, believed they represented the truth, but we see that in fact, they failed to pay attention to how they listened and understood the entire Gospel. Their failure is a constant reminder for us in the Church today.

The Christian who truly hears God's Word is one who lives his life listening to the Word of God, and following the Word of God.

May The Sower of the Word, Our Lord Jesus Christ, nourish us with Life-Giving Words. And let us glorify and praise Him, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages.

Amen.