

PARABLE OF THE SOWER, Luke 8:5-15
By Archpriest Peter Olsen
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The sower in today's parable is God. The seeds which are sown are the Word of God. God sent His disciples throughout the world to preach the "Good News," the Gospel. This mission continues today with the successors of the apostles who continue to sow the seeds of God everywhere in the world. In addition, the lay people are also called to be missionaries and help in our sacred task to preach the Gospel, and many of them sow these seeds as well. This is a sacred mission that will always need to be fulfilled. People forget God and need to be reminded of His presence, and others, for various reasons do not know the Word of God, or have a distorted understanding of the Christian faith. It is up to those who hear the Word to decide for themselves how they will react after the seeds have been sown in their hearts. God and none of His disciples force anyone to follow Christ, to have faith and to live a Christian life. For many reasons some people choose not to accept Christ. Some will not even listen. For many reasons there are others who choose Christ but lose their way and fall off the path to salvation.

When we wander and lose our faith, God never stops loving us, even when we fail. Sometimes we might be tempted to think that there is too much between us and God that He cannot overlook, and we don't know how to get back. Returning is very simple. Just get on your knees and say "God, I'm back." When you return, hold fast to the love that first drew you to him, and God will manifest Himself to you. There is a lot of noise and distraction in the world which can separate us from God. We must learn to filter out the noise and be able to recognize His voice above any other sound. When we listen to God, we must be ready to follow through and do the things that He asks of us. It is easy for us to become discouraged in life, but we must adjust our perspective to view everything against the backdrop of a victorious Savior. Then we will be able to face anything with confidence and peace. Life is full of broken promises and disappointments, so it is easy for us to become skeptical and anxious. The beautiful truth is that God never breaks His promises. If we live our lives patiently by always placing our trust in Christ, then we will have peace in our souls as we walk on the path to salvation. If we are focused only on the cares here on earth, we will quickly find ourselves overwhelmed by fear and uncertainty. If we fix our eyes on Christ and the promise of Heaven, then we cannot help but be filled with peace, joy and hope. It is important not to forget that our time here is temporary and that the joy of Heaven is eternal. By being mindful of our own fleeting existence on earth, we can spend our energies not on the pressures of earth, but rather on the purpose of Heaven, which will last forever. There are different ways of dealing with worry. When we bring our worry to God and lay our anxious hearts bare before Him, He will encourage us, lift us up, and sustain us. He will not allow us to be shaken or weakened by worry because He holds us through every situation. As Christ says in today's Gospel, it is easy to be choked by the pleasures and riches of life, like a plant which is choked by weeds. Our heart and devotion must be fully committed to God. The Lord says that you cannot serve both God and riches ~ "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon" (Matt. 6:24).

Just like the gardener who sows his seeds, we must take care of the seeds sown by God in the soil of our hearts. The gardener must have patience with his seedlings. He must water his garden, fertilize it, and protect it from insects and animals who threaten to destroy his seedlings and plants. We also must have patience and nurture and tend to our faith and not expect to bear fruit immediately. The garden of our hearts must be watered with the tears of our repentance, it must be fed by the spiritual nourishment of prayer, fasting and receiving the Holy Mysteries. The Devil and his hosts are always threatening to devour the seedlings planted by God in our hearts. Like the gardener who builds a fence around his garden, we must build a

wall and a guard around our hearts, a wall of purity, a wall of virtue, and a wall of humble obedience to God. Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk says that God does not merely cast his seeds and leave them to grow or die on their own. Above all, for the seedlings in our hearts to grow into mighty trees and bear an abundance of fruit, the most important component is the presence of God in our lives. If we are the plants that grow, then God is the gardener who cares for His seeds and tends to His garden. If we always trust in God and cling to Him, then He will always care for and take care of us. The final verse in today's Scripture is "And as for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bring forth fruit with patience." Amen.