

Sermon : Faith and Action: Parable of the Sower: Luke 8:5-15, October 15, 2017

From the very beginning when God created man and woman, all human beings were given the awesome gift of free will. We all have the ability to choose between good and evil. That choice became an especially awesome responsibility when Adam and Eve ate from the tree of knowledge in the Garden of Eden. After the flood God increased the help and guidance that He gave to mankind, so God made a covenant with man and God gave us specific commandments and guidelines to help us to make good choices and to help us to discern between what is good and what is evil.

Faith is not something passive that we just think about. Genuine faith is expressed not only by talking about our beliefs but it is something that is expressed by concrete actions and choices, and by actually living and doing the things that we believe. Jesus plants the seeds of faith in our hearts. Those seeds are planted many ways with our Lord's help. They are planted by the teaching and examples of our parents and our teachers. They are planted by the clergy in church when we worship. They are planted when we listen to the Word of God. They are planted when we witness the lives and actions of men and women who have deep faith. They are planted by reading spiritual books written by men and women who are filled with the Holy Spirit. These seeds are planted in our hearts through many and diverse ways throughout our lifetime. The growth of these sacred seeds now depends upon the choices that we make and what we do or do not do about it. If the farmer plants seeds, but does not first cultivate and till the soil, and if the farmer does not water and feed the seeds, if the farmer does not protect the seeds from insects or weeds, then the seeds will be devoured or wither and die. It is the same thing with the spiritual seeds of faith which are planted in our hearts.

The ultimate test for how well we take care of and nurture the seeds of our faith is not what we say but what we do. We can say with our lips that we believe in God, but we can at the same time deny God by the way we live our lives. There is a well known expression that you must not only "talk the talk but you must walk the walk." If a man believes that there is a God that guides the destiny of the universe and has planted a moral law that is as abiding as the physical laws, he will act like it. And if he doesn't act like it, then, as St. Paul says, all of his impressive eloquence concerning his belief in God becomes as sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal. Belief is ultimately validated in action. The ultimate test of a man's sincerity in crying "Lord, Lord" is found in his active doing of God's will.

Genuine faith is not a mere form of externals, rituals and rules. Genuine faith is a dynamic force, and making Christianity a dynamic force in our lives is one area in which we have failed miserably. There are between 225 and 300 million individuals in the world today who identify themselves as Orthodox Christians. If you add all the other various religions that identify themselves as Christian, then there are about 2.18 billion Christians in the world today. If Christ's faith and way of life was a vital force in anything like that number, the condition of the world would be far better than it is. One poet described Christianity as practiced by many as a mere Sunday habit with no genuine force. Sadly, we see less and less individuals who identify themselves as Christians who even practice Christianity as even a Sunday habit. Sunday has become just another day for many, no different than any other day of the week, and attendance in Church on Sunday is considered not vital but optional. In the book of Genesis the first time we encounter the word "holy" is on the seventh day, after God has completed creation, the Lord rests on the sabbath, and the sabbath is called "holy." The meaning of the Hebrew word that is translated here as "holy" when it is used in Genesis means that it belongs to God. Therefore, the Lord's day belongs to God, it is not our property to do what we want with it. If we are Christians, then our observance of the Lord's day is not negotiable but should be understood as vital for our salvation. The fourth commandment as given to Moses on Mt. Sinai states: "Remember the sabbath day and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your

work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or daughter, your male or female slave, or your cattle, or the stranger who is within your settlements. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth and sea, and all that is in them, and He rested on the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and hallowed it” (Exodus 20).

Lord, help us to remember that without you we are nothing. Help us to remember that without you we can do nothing. Let everything that we do be according to your Divine will and according to your commandments. Help us to cherish and to take care of the precious seedlings that have your holy name inscribed on them and which are taking root and growing in our hearts. Help the little flame that burns within us to grow into a huge bonfire of faith. O Lord and Shepherd of our souls, always lead and guide us through the storm of temptations and obstacles. With our faith intact and our lives renewed, may we find repose, rest and comfort in the green pastures of your goodness and steadfast love, and may we dwell in the house of the Lord. Amen