

July 13, 2014 – 15th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Prepared by Sr. Cathy Encarnacion, MM, Philippines

Isaiah 55:10-11; Psalms 65:10, 11, 12-13, 14; Romans 8:18-23; Matthew 13:1-23 or 13:1-9

The first two readings today comes across like a conversation between the Creator and the Psalmist. In Isaiah, G*d says that the rain and snow that fall from the heavens do not return until they have made the earth bring forth and sprout, and in Psalms, the writer responds in the affirmative, having witnessed how indeed the whole land shouts out with joy – wilderness, meadows and valleys overflow with their produce of pastures and grains.

Both passages emphasize the point that all fruits of the Earth are gifts from G*d. The people of the Scriptures clearly project their awe and deep gratitude for their ultimate Provider. This kind of attitude questions how we as a people view things during the present times. What kind of attitudes do we have? Do we still consider the food we get from the land as gifts from G*d? Are we at least able to recognize G*d's providence in the nurturance of the plants and animals by the sun and rain as creations of G*d? Or are we just grateful for high-tech greenhouses, modern irrigation systems and chemical fertilizers? With great advancements in science and technology today, even the food we eat sometimes feel more like a science project than nourishment for our bodies and soul. Whom do we thank before we partake of any meal?

Having lived closely and worked with some indigenous peoples of Panama and the Philippines, I have been privileged to witness and take part in some of their rituals that speak of their respect and honor for the whole of Creation. They have rituals before they take or put anything into the Earth and for every kind of event that they may hold: Whether it is to start a planting season or fertilize their fields; before harvesting; in celebration of the union of a couple; the birth of a new member of their tribe; how to mourn the dead. Whether it be a community gathering, passages from childhood to adulthood, or even imposing sanctions to an erring member, there are special rituals.

On one particular occasion, the community where I often stayed for a week at a time was about to celebrate an important feast, so we set off to a nearby river to catch fish. Before the members of the community went into the water, they first had a ritual thanking G*d for rivers, then proceeded to ask permission from the water and fish for what they were about to do. They explained to me how conscious they are of their dependency on Mother Nature for their very life. They always want to honor her and make every effort to raise their children with the same sensitivity and care for the whole Earth.

However, they admitted that with the influence of media, information explosion and mono-hip-hop culture, this kind of consciousness is becoming more and more of a struggle and sadly, this experience of this community is reflected more and more everywhere. Our science tells us that the way that we, as human beings, use up earth's resources, without any care, is threatening to our own existence. Much of our forests are being denuded at such alarming rates that oxygen levels may fall lower than what is necessary to sustain life; our rivers and lakes are dying from pollution; and our wildlife are disappearing even before we had the opportunity to encounter them – wildlife which some scientists believe could hold the cures for diseases that we are just discovering now. Ecological backlash is being felt everywhere in the form of super-typhoons, tsunamis, snow storms, tornadoes and erratic temperature levels.

Thousands of families have been displaced, thousands of lives lost, hundreds of community left in shambles, people starving, getting sick and suffering all kinds of traumas from these events. Yet, the letter to the Romans today insists “that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us ... For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God even as creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves” Perhaps it is time for us to hear and take to heart what the late Thomas Berry, a Catholic priest of the Passionist order, cultural historian and eco-theologian (cosmologist) kept reminding us, “that the earth is a communion of subjects and not a collection of objects” of which we are an important part. We are important, he continues to say, because we are THE part of the Earth which is able to be self-reflective. We are able to make decisions that do not purely follow self-preservation instincts.

We consider many factors and make decisions that are not only choices between good and evil but rather choices between several good things, for example: Parents of poor families, after working so hard to put food on their table, will wait to eat a morsel until their children have eaten well; conscientious consumers would pay higher prices in consideration of fair labor practices and trade; and politicians with integrity would vote only for bills that would benefit the whole.

It seems there is no real difference between the groaning of the Earth and the sufferings we experience as human beings. The parable of the sower we read today challenges us to be true followers of Jesus, to have ears that can listen: To Earth’s groaning, so that we may know how to relate with her as a subject; to the indigenous peoples, so that we can realize our dependency on the Earth (that we need to tread gently and ask permission before we take so we do not overindulge); to the astronauts who saw our planet in space and realized Earth’s vulnerability; and to the mystics who in stillness and being fully present to life intuit that we are all one! That what ails one, ails the whole. We, according to the parable, are the different types of soil. Not all of us could enfold the message the same way. Some of us could be so eager to act rightly but concerns of our daily living could impede us from responding well; some of us may be going through difficult times and therefore could not even begin to imagine how to respond in a way that is life-giving; some of us might not be able to do anything due to many other limitations; still some of us could and our efforts would produce a hundred fold, more than enough to sustain us all.

The message of all our readings today is clear: the Creator, the Sower G*d provides for all of us, without discrimination. We all share the same life and each with our own particular gifts and contributions to make in this world. We can commit to spreading the good news, be instruments of peace, be fountains of hope, be celebrators of diversity, be true to our faith and attend to the last, the least and the lost of this world wherever we maybe, in any way we can.

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