

THE SOWER WENT OUT TO SOW
Biblical Commentary by Father Alberto Maggi OSM

Matthew 13,1-23

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. And great crowds gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat down. And the whole crowd stood on the beach. And he told them many things in parables, saying: “A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil, but when the sun rose they were scorched. And since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. He who has ears, let him hear.”

Then the disciples came and said to him, “Why do you speak to them in parables?” And he answered them, “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. Indeed, in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says:

““You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive.”

For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.’

But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.

“Hear then the parable of the sower: When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path. As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away. As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.”

The parable of the sower, narrated by Jesus in Matthew's gospel at the beginning of chapter 13, is an encouragement for all those who announce the word. The result does not depend on the seed, the word, but on the terrain or ground. To understand this parable, it is necessary to refer to the announcement found in the prophet Isaiah 55,11, by the Lord: “...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 shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.” The Lord assures that his word contains within itself a creative energy, the same word as the Creator who said: “Let there be light,” and there was

light.” therefore this word contains a creative energy which, when it meets the right ground , develops all its potential.

Jesus illustrates in this parable, the possibilities, and also the difficulties, in welcoming this word. It is Jesus himself who explains it, so in the second part, we go to the explanation, Jesus states: “ *Hear then the parable of the sower:*” obviously it is Jesus, and all those who sow this word, “ *When anyone hears the word of the Kingdom...*” the word is of the Kingdom, the alternative society proposed by Jesus, “*..and does not understand it..*” why is it not understand ? It is not understood because in order to welcome the kingdom, Jesus puts a condition, conversion. What does conversion mean? If up to now you have lived for yourself and for your needs, from today your life completely changes, you live for the good and needs of others, this is the alternative society, the kingdom proposed by Jesus,

“*and does not understand it, the evil one comes*”, Jesus had already spoken of this evil one when, in chapter 5,37 he said: “*Let what you say be simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything more than this comes from evil*” what is this evil?. While God is love who puts himself at the service of mankind, the evil one is the power that dominates them. Then Jesus warns that all those who live under the sphere of power are completely refractory to his word, in fact he says “*..snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path.*” therefore it is useless to sow the seed because the birds arrive immediately. What does this mean? Those who hold power naturally see, in this message of Jesus, a threat to their dominion over people, but also those who aspire to obtain power, because they see in the message of Jesus a risk for their ambitions, but the most tragic category (it is composed of) those who are subject to power, because they see in Jesus' message an attack on security that submission to power gives, these are completely refractory

“*As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy,..*” therefore sees in this word the answer to one's desire for fullness of life, “*..yet he has no root in himself,..*” the individual is not transformed “*..but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away.*” Jesus in the announcement from parable said “*..but when the sun rose..*” the sun is a source, it is a life factor for the plant; if it burns it, it is not the sun's fault, it is that the plant could not take root. So here for Jesus the effect alone is tribulation or persecution: persecution for the individual and for the community is not a destruction factor, but growth factor; if it destroys it is because the individual, the community have not changed their existence. And so in this case it also fails.

“*As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.*” Jesus made conversion the condition, that is, live for others and not for yourself; if you live for yourself, you are in precarious economic conditions, you see the solution in money, but as soon as you can obtain or get this money, new ambitions, new needs are born, and again you are in economic concern. So who thinks only of their needs, who is always worried about their economic condition, how can they ever deal with the needs of others?

And last “*As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it.*” he understands precisely why he converted, “ *He indeed bears fruit and yields,..*” to understand

the paradoxical expression of Jesus it is necessary to know that, in the culture of the time, a grain of wheat was made out of an ear with seven or eight grains. When the vintage was good, the ear of corn had ten grains, on exceptional occasions there was even an ear with thirty grains, but it was an exceptional thing. Well what is exceptional for men, Jesus puts it last, in fact he says “*..in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.*” What does Jesus mean ? When the soil is right , the creative word unleashes all its capacity, all its potential, in a way that man cannot even imagine.