

**THE SOWER WENT OUT TO SOW – Biblical Commentary by F. Alberto Maggi OSM**

**Mt 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. 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 that we find in Matthew's Gospel at chapter 13 does not want to be so much an invitation to examine ourselves, but as an encouragement for the disciples in announcing the gospel. If in three fields it fails, in the fourth the fruit is abundant which repays for all the failures. Why? Jesus trusts in the power of the creative word.

Jesus' Word is the same Word that God said: "*Let there be light, and there was light.*" That God who in the prophet Isaiah guarantees: "*...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.*" (Isaiah 55 ,11 ) This is the strength of Jesus' message.

Therefore His Word contains within itself an energy, a creative power that, once received, frees all its power. Then Jesus explains this in a parable. Why does He explain in a parable? To the disciples that had started "*to the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven*"..... what are these mysteries? The mysteries are a secret knowledge. And what is the secret knowledge of the Kingdom of Heaven? That the love of God is universal.

The love of God does not have a chosen people or is part of the privileged world. The love of God is universal. But this cannot be told to the people. The people, rim full of a nationalistic ideology, would have refused Jesus, as when in Luke's Gospel Jesus tries to suggest this at Nazareth and barely escapes being lynched.

Therefore Jesus talks to the people in parables, so that those that are on the same wavelength can understand; for the others it will be a thought that they must then mature.

And Jesus proposes this parable of the Sower and it is Jesus Himself that comments it, therefore we will only underline His comment. "*And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured.*" Therefore here there is a part of the seeds that, as soon as they are sown are taken away. Therefore a part does not seed itself.

And Jesus Himself will comment: "*When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it,*" because to understand these words there is need of a conversion. Like the phrase in Isaiah chapter 6, 9-10, that Jesus had quoted this parable, when the prophet Isaiah confronted with the misunderstanding of the people, and finished with '*Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive. Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.*"

To understand the Lord's Word there is need for a conversion and the conversion in Matthew's Gospel is to put the good of mankind in first place as the absolute value. Well then, says Jesus, " *When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it,..*" exactly because there is no conversion, " *... the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path.*"

Evil is the image of power, of ambition. These people are completely lost or hostile to the Lord's Word. They even see it as a threat to their own interests. Therefore a total failure; in the first not even a seeding.

*"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."* The effect of the sun is beneficial for the plants, it is that which gives strength and makes them grow. But here they were burnt. But the sun is not at fault, the fault is with the plant, actually the ground, because being rocky, the plants were unable to put down roots so they dried up.

So, the first did not take root and in the second shoots came, but were dried up straight away. And it is Jesus Himself that comments: " *As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy..*," therefore the enthusiasts of this message, that see in Jesus' words an answer to their desire for the fullness of life, but " *... he has no root in himself*", the words do not take root in the person, they do not penetrate, they do not transform him. The word of God is received and , once received, this releases all its capacity that transforms the individual.

If there is not this " *...when tribulation or persecution arises..*" But Jesus has proclaimed that the persecuted are blessed! It is obvious that announcing this message of love goes against the interests of the world that lives on power and it is normal that there is misunderstanding or persecution caused by these words. And Jesus says: " *..immediately he falls away.*" Literally " is shocked", that he stumbles. Therefore these enthusiastic people that think that following Jesus is to go towards applause, awards, in fact when they see that it leads to misunderstanding and persecution, fall away.

Jesus continues: " *Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them.*" Here the soil was good, but it was a soil where there were also thorns. The plant grew, the thorns grew and suffocated the plant. And Jesus comments: " *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.*"

What does this mean? The cares of the world see in money and richness their solution. Well then, when one obtains this richness, this money, it brings new ambitions, new desires , new needs and one finds oneself with new economic preoccupation, still seeing in money the solution.

So a person that is always concerned economically, a person that always thinks and exclusively for himself, how can he think of others? It is this that suffocates the Word. Here the tragedy is that the soil is good, it produces, but the person has not uprooted the bad plant of ambition, of riches. For Jesus the

value of the person consists in his generosity, and a person that is always preoccupied with himself naturally cannot be generous.

Finally Jesus says: *“Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain,..”* Therefore the first does not grow, the second grows and then dries up, the third grows and then is suffocated, here in the good soil it frees all its energy *“...some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.”*

At the time of Jesus, in the culture of the age, when from a seed grew an ear of corn with ten or thirteen grains it was already considered a good harvest, because the norm was seven or eight grains . In an exceptional year there were ears of corn with thirty grains. Well then, that which is exceptional, abundant, Jesus puts it at the end.

Jesus says that a hundred, sixty or thirty will be fruitful. He does not begin with thirty and then sixty and a hundred. That which is extraordinary Jesus puts at the end. At the beginning He puts a hundred. When there is a conversion and the word is received without putting any limits, the word frees all of its creative energy and transforms itself in blessings. The number a hundred in the Bible is the image of blessings.

The Word enters into the individual, transforms him, the individual himself becomes this Word, and his existence is a blessing for all who come into contact with him.