

A 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, told by Jesus in Matthew's gospel at the beginning of chapter 13, is an encouragement to all those that announce his words. The result does not depend on the seeds, on the words, but the soil. To understand this parable, it is necessary to refer to the announcement that is found in the book of the Prophet Isaiah, on behalf of 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." (Isaiah 55,11) The Lord assures that his word contains in itself a creative energy, the same word of the Creator that said: "Let there be light," and there was light." (Genesis 1,3) therefore these words contain a creative energy that, when they encounter a suitable soil, they develop all their potential.

Jesus illustrates in this parable, the possibility, and also the difficulties in the acceptance of these words. It is Jesus himself that explains, therefore, in the second part, we go straight to the explanation. Jesus states: *"Hear then the parable of the sower:"* that evidently is Jesus, and all those who "sow" (spread) this word, *"When anyone hears the word of the kingdom..."* the word of the Kingdom, the alternative society that Jesus proposes, *"..does not understand it,"* why is it not understood? It is not understood, because to accept the Kingdom, Jesus makes conversion a condition. What does a conversion mean? If until now you have lived for yourself, for your needs and necessities, from today on life changes completely, you live for the good and necessities of others, this is the alternative society. The Kingdom proposed by Jesus.

"And does not understand it, the evil one comes..." Jesus had already talked of this evil when, in chapter 5, he said: *"Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil."* (Matthew 5,37) What is this evil? While God is love that puts itself to the service of mankind, evil is the power that dominates it. So, Jesus warns that, all those who live under the sphere of power, are completely resistant to his word. In fact he says: *"..and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path."* So the sowing is useless because the birds arrive. Meaning? All those that hold the power naturally they see, in Jesus' message, a threat to their domination over the people, but also those who seek to obtain power because they see in Jesus' message a risk to their ambitions. The most tragic category are those that are under the power, because they see in Jesus' message an attack on the 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,..." so it is seen in these words the reply to one's own desire of the fullness of life. *"..yet he has no root in himself,"* what does this mean? That these words "has no root", that is does not transform the individual, *"..but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away"* Jesus in announcing the parable said: *".. when the sun rose.."* "The sun is a source, it is a life factor for the plant; if it scorches the plant the sun is not to blame, because it is that the plant could not put out roots. So, here for Jesus the effect of the sun is the tribulation or persecution. The persecution for the individual and for the community, is not a factor of destruction, but a factor of growth. If it destroys, it is because the individual and community have not changed their own existence. And so also this case 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 has put the conversion as a condition. That is living for others and not for oneself; if you live for yourself, you find yourself in a precarious economic condition, you see the solution in money, but as soon as you can get this money, new ambitions, new needs are born, and you are again in economic concern. So who only thinks of their own needs, who is always worried about their economic condition, how can they ever deal with the needs and necessities of others?

At the end *"As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it"* understood because he is converted, *"He indeed bears fruit and yields"* To understand this paradoxical phrase, it is necessary to know that, in the culture of the time, from an ear of corn seven or eight grains of wheat were obtained. In a good year, the ear of corn produced ten grains, in exceptional occasions an ear could produce thirty, but this was very exceptional. Well that is for the exceptional people, Jesus puts it at the end, and says: *"...in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty."* What is it that Jesus wants to say? When the soil is suitable, the creative word releases all of its capabilities, its full potential, in a way that humans cannot even imagine.