

15th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Roots-1977. A television dramatization of Alex Haley's book called Roots, which is about his family lineage beginning with his African ancestor Kunta Kinte's enslavement to the liberation of his descendants. It's about knowing the truth of where he came from, how his ancestors went from a proud African family heritage to suffering the depraved indignity of slavery and finally to liberation and freedom. Not many of us have been able to research our family histories like Alex Haley, but if we did, it could give us a deeper appreciation of who we are and how we got to where we are today.

The royal family in England can supposedly trace their ancestry all the way back to King David.

My great uncle was a saddle maker in Missouri and we have a letter that he wrote back to the old country asking one of the village girls to come to America to be his wife. He concluded the letter by saying that if she didn't feel so inclined to make the journey over, would she be so kind as to ask her sister if she might be interested. Knowing our family roots can give us a certain gravitas, a sense of belonging and a connection to our heritage whether we come from a noble lineage or a checkered past or a mix of both.

The reason Jesus says it is important for us to plant good roots is so the harvest will be good. This parish land was donated by grandma and grandpa Kelly back in the 1950's when this was a wheat field on 11th street outside of town on a dirt road. That is a part of our parish roots and it has been a great gift to the heritage of this parish. It's good to know our parish roots and our family history. But those are not the only roots that Jesus is talking about today. He's talking about being deeply rooted in God's Word. The parish that the people built on this site in the early 1960's and then expanded in the late 1990's were not built only on poured concrete and a bank loan. It was built on a foundation of God's word. Those people that planted their faith on fertile soil back then are still producing a harvest here year after year. We can be grateful to those families that sacrificed and served this community that we are benefiting from. And we can do the same for the next generation if we are planting our spiritual seeds on fertile ground.

What does that look like? How do we plant seeds on fertile soil to bear good fruit?

It requires two parts.

1) St. Paul says the first part requires enduring suffering. Groaning as he puts it. We may experience groaning as sighs after a long day of work or study, or listening to people who are going through a difficult time. Regardless, we are going to have to put up with people's problems, whether it's whining and complaining, or whether it's listening to their story with 100% interest, it will take mental discipline and emotional energy to be present to people without judging them but also to resist the temptation to want to fix them.

St. Gregory the Great said that we must patiently listen to other people's chatter.

St. Paul says that we will have to endure tedium for the sake of the Kingdom of God.

So that is one part of spiritual growth. Listening, and being present to people without judging or fixing.

To do that we have to be spiritually grounded in God's word.

2) To be spiritually rooted in the word of God we look in the Jesus almanac of how and where, and where not to plant for good spiritual growth. We cannot expect God's word to take root in our lives if we plant it on shallow, rocky or weedy soil.

Jesus says: "A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and birds came and ate it up:

That might be like getting our spiritual daily bread through hearsay or casual conversation or tv talk shows. It comes from other people's insights, but it is on the surface, and easy to pick a part of you are not firmly rooted in your faith.

Some fell on rocky ground, where it had little soil. It sprang up at once because the soil was not deep, and when the sun rose it was scorched, and it withered for lack of roots:

Again if our spiritual nourishment is only coming from what we hear on the radio or at mass once a week or even at daily mass, or some secular spiritual readings, or if we are a new convert or an old Catholic that stopped learning after 10th grade confirmation class, then what little growth we may have made can be susceptible to withering away as soon as someone or some life challenge comes along because our spiritual roots are too shallow. We need to be gentle and tend to our new growth.

Some seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it:

Thorns can be bad habits or abusive relationships. Thorns can be gossip, pornography, gambling addictions, thorns could be social media, sports or over-spending or whatever competes with our faith, our time with God, reading scripture.

A rule of thumb to measure our planting might be to use a spiritual rain gauge.
How much time do I spend each day filling up my thorn gauge?
And how much time each day do I spend filling my God gauge?

Finally, Jesus says, "But some seed fell on rich soil and produced fruit, a hundred or sixty fold. Those who have ears ought to hear."

Planting on Rich soil will take some groaning and some waiting. We can tell where we are in our spiritual growth in our life by the harvest we see in our lives. If my spiritual life is shallow, withering or getting choked out then I'm probably not engaging others about God and I'm filling my souls gauge with things that don't have a lot of impact on my eternity with God. If I'm working to plant my spiritual life on fertile soil, then not only will my life be richer but the lives of those coming after me will also benefit. The more fertile our soil, the more abundant the harvest. The deeper the roots the stronger we can be to weather the storms.

- So, do I groan because I'm bored with others or do I groan because I care for them?
- Where am I planting seeds of faith? Shallow or rocky soil?
- Or in the rich and fertile land of God's word?
- What kind of harvest am I expecting?
- What kind of harvest will Jesus get?

As st. Theresa of Avila said,
"All things must come to the soul from its roots, from where it is planted."