

HOMILY OF HIS EXCELLENCY ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE
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My dear friends in Christ, I am delighted to be with you today. I thank Mr. Emanuele Contini for his kind and gracious invitation. As the Holy Father's representative in this country, I want to express his spiritual closeness to each of you and to assure you of his prayers. It is wonderful to see so many young, missionary disciples!

As missionary disciples, we must remember that we are first disciples who learn from Jesus by listening to his words. In today's Gospel, Jesus preaches from the boat as the vast crowd stands along the shore to listen to His words. The hearts of those gathered are longing for this word. Jesus does not speak to them in lofty language, but He teaches them using simple language and images from everyday life.

Jesus tells the parable of the sower and the seed, which produces more or less fruit, depending on the type of soil upon which it falls. The seed on the path is eaten by birds; the seed on rocky ground is scorched; the seed among thorns is choked. Only the seed that falls on good soil bears abundant fruit.

The seed on the path represents those who hear the word about the kingdom but fail to understand it. We have received the grace of baptism and have heard God's Word, but do we understand it? Do we struggle to explore its meaning or try to apply the word to our lives? For many, faith and the Word remain outside – waiting to be “eaten by the birds.” Jesus warns that a lack of reflection and a lack of appreciation of the gift of the Word leave us susceptible to the Evil One who does not wish the Gospel to take root in the hearts of the children of God.

The second place where the seed falls is on rocky ground. In this case, the people receive God's Word and understand it, but in a superficial manner. There are no roots to the seed of faith that has been planted. In the face of challenges and setbacks, still rooted in the things of this world, they give up without turning to God or praying for the grace of perseverance. The Holy Father laments this tragic situation, writing:

“God save us from a worldly Church with superficial spiritual and pastoral trappings! This stifling worldliness can only be healed by breathing the pure air of the Holy Spirit who frees us from self-centeredness cloaked in outward religiosity bereft of God.” (EG, 97)

The third place where the seed falls is among the thorns. Jesus explains that this occurs when people who hear the word are seduced because of their cares for the world or are seduced by riches and wealth; spiritual values and the soul itself are choked, and the seed, instead of growing, dies. This happens when we give in to what other people think rather than doing what we know to be right and just; it is a form of “human respect”. It is like giving in to “peer pressure” to preserve ourselves instead of being courageous. The Pope describes it this way:

“Spiritual worldliness, which hides behind the appearance of piety and even love for the Church, consists in seeking not the Lord's glory but human glory and

personal well-being...It is a subtle way of seeking 'one's own interests, not those of Jesus Christ' (Phil 2:21)." (EG, 93)

Finally, there is the seed that falls on good soil, which represents the model disciple, who receives, accepts, understands and cherishes the Word of God. These are the disciples who bear fruit that will last. The best example of this for us is the Blessed Virgin Mary, who listened carefully to the message of the Archangel Gabriel, and who accepted the angel's message, even if, at first, she did not fully understand. Rather than stifling the spirit, she surrendered to God, saying *May it be done to me according to your Word*, and allowing herself to conceive by the Holy Spirit. In this she was a perfect disciple.

She never ceased to be a disciple but she was also a missionary disciple. Having received the Word within her, she made haste to visit Elizabeth, bringing her and John the Baptist great joy. Finally, she gave birth to her Son, sharing him with the poor shepherds, the magi, who represented all the nations of the earth, and even the animals, representing all of creation.

While we are tempted to go out and engage in missionary work, the Gospel invites us to be more like Mary by first being a disciple. How is the "soil" of our heart? Does it receive, accept, understand and cherish the gift of the Word? Jesus says in another place that *what comes out of a man comes from what is in his heart*. (cf. Mt 15:18) If we are to be good missionaries, proclaiming the words people really need to hear, then our hearts must be pure, receptive to the Word of God, just as Mary's was.

Today is the Feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. May she intercede for us so that we may bear abundant fruit for the Lord.