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The word of God will never fail

by Thomas Gumbleton

The Peace Pulpit

Every so often, I get in the mail (and probably some of you do also) notices about retreats, workshops and various kinds of activities like that, that will enlighten us and strengthen us in our faith.

Recently I got one that proclaimed about its content: "When hopes are dashed, positive actions are stalled. When your one step forward is met with two steps back, where do we find our sustenance? How do we nurture ourselves in one another?"

Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Isaiah 55:10-11

I think probably all of us have had somewhat that kind of experience where we feel we're growing in faith, we're strengthened in faith, but then we begin to find difficulties.

Psalm 65:10, 11, 12-13, 14

Especially today with what's going on in our church, we're disappointed at the way the leadership of our church in many ways has failed us, especially through the abuse crisis that continues to go on. Or we feel discouraged because of what's happening in our world. We have an economy that is in great trouble and we don't seem to know really how to fix it. And we're engaged in war, and have been for 20 years. We really don't seem to know how to extract ourselves and to bring peace.

Romans 8:18-23

Matthew 13:1-23

Full text of the readings

So we wonder: Well, Jesus said, "The reign of God is at hand." He said that 2,000 years ago, and yet we are experiencing all of these difficulties, and we do begin, at times, to be discouraged and to lose hope.

That's why today's scriptures are very, very important to us, because they're about the word of God and how that word of God cannot fail. Jesus says, "The reign of God is at hand; it is breaking forth." That's the word of God -- it can't fail.

In fact, the parable that Jesus tells in today's gospel, I think is his way of showing us that in spite of the fact that he doesn't have many followers, and in spite of the fact that even some of his followers simply don't seem to understand what he's proclaiming -- his way of love. They're still looking for a new, powerful, earthly kingdom like that of David. They don't understand, and you would think he'd be very discouraged, but instead, Jesus tells us this parable about the word of God, the seed, as seen as the word of God.

When the farmer is planting, the seed is broadcast everywhere and of course most of it doesn't produce any fruit, but that that falls on the good soil produces an extraordinary amount, a hundredfold or sixtyfold or thirtyfold. The most a farmer could expect at the time of Jesus from the seed the farmer planted would be less than tenfold, but Jesus says the word of God, once it's planted, is going to break forth and produce a hundredfold; it has an extraordinary, unlimited power, this word of God.

How did Jesus get that confidence that the word of God was so powerful, and that the word of God would never fail?

Well, Jesus had prayed many, many times, I'm sure, this passage from the book of Isaiah, a passage that was proclaimed by the prophet at a time when the people were in exile and there seemed to be no hope for them, yet God was preparing the way for them to be liberated, to be brought back out of exile, back to their homeland, and it happened through the pagan king Cyrus.

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Jesus was confident because he had prayed those words of Isaiah, "As the rain and the snow come down from the heavens and do not return until they have watered the earth, making it yield seed for the sower and food for others to eat, so is my word."

The prophet speaking for God is saying that "my word that goes forth out of my mouth will not return to me idle." It's a word of power, a word that makes things happen, a word that brings results. "It shall accomplish my will, the purpose for which it has been sent."

So now Jesus proclaims God's word, "The reign of God is at hand." It will happen, it is happening in ways that sometimes we're not aware of, so we need to begin to develop our own sense of confidence in that word of God.

Yes, our church can be reformed because Jesus is still present within it. Our world can be healed of violence and hatred and war because God is still at work in this world and God's word does not return to God idle.

The reign of God is breaking forth, and that's what we hear so clearly from St. Paul, who tells us, "I consider that the suffering of our present life cannot be compared with the glory that will be revealed and given to us. We know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pangs of birth, and that creation alone but even ourselves, although the spirit was given to us as a foretaste of what we are to receive, we groan in our innermost being, eagerly awaiting the day when God will give us the fullness of life and joy and

peace."

That's the reign of God.

Those first Christians believed in that, trusted in that, so in spite of their being persecuted and the church suffering tremendously, they were confident, filled with hope.

So we too can experience a profound sense of confidence and hope if we begin to reflect on what we've heard today -- the prophet Isaiah, Jesus himself, Paul writing to the Christians at Rome -- assuring us that the word of God is at work within each of us and within our world.

So we never give up hope.

We are people of joy, people of a sense of security, sureness, that God is at work in our world and the reign of God, which has already broken forth through God, will bring it into its fullness in each one of us and into all of creation.

So if we feel any discouragement at any time about what is happening in our world or in our personal lives or in the church, listen to the word of God and be sure that that word of God does not return to God idle, but brings forth everything God has promised.

[This homily was given at St. Hilary Parish, Redford, Mich.]

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