

Sower & the Seed AND QAC!!
July 16, 2017 – 15th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Joan

This banner represents the statement that we recite together every Sunday morning, during the fraction rite. What some of you might not realize is that it originated as the Queen of Apostles Community mission statement. In today's Liturgy, we are concentrating on the spoken word. Part of our first reading today, paraphrased, says "the word that goes forth from my mouth... shall do my will, achieving the end for which I sent it." Through this relatively quiet Liturgy, I am hoping to focus the attention to the Liturgy of the Word, the beautiful prayers that are said during the Consecration, and in particular, this mission statement.

The first word of our mission statement is "We." This means all of us, and not just while we are together in this chapel, but wherever we are and whatever we are doing, alone or with other people.

The second word is "proclaim." Notice that we don't simply "say" what the mission is. To proclaim means to stand loud and proud to declare our convictions.

What are we proclaiming? Our willingness. To be willing to do something doesn't necessarily mean we are obligated to do it, or that we are being rewarded or compensated for it, or even that we are just capable of doing it. For example, I know that I am capable of hiking up the side of a mountain, but that doesn't mean I'm willing to do so. "Willingness" denotes a desire combined with intention.

So we proclaim that we're willing to do two things, the first of which is "to build." Do you notice that the words here are not "to maintain what we've already built?" In other words, the action of building is not finished yet, and we are proclaiming that we are willing to keep working at it. Building anything normally starts with two factors: a need and a plan. Many of us tend to think of QAC as our second home. Those of you who live in houses know that your home is never completely finished. You needed a house, and someone at some point drew up a set of plans for the building. But, after living there for some time, your needs may change. Perhaps you become empty-nesters and you want to do something different with the third bedroom – new need, new plans, a remodeling project gets underway. Maybe you get to a point where you could potentially be empty-nesters, but you decide to adopt four more children – new need, new plans, the space gets rearranged to accommodate the additional family members. You become older and decide to close off the upstairs and the basement to live on just one floor – new need, new plans, modifications are necessary. That is what we're experiencing right now this 44-year-old community. Members have moved on, leaving our numbers much smaller than they were 20 years ago. New people come to join us and, wouldn't you know, those newer people come here with ideas of their own that we never considered before and don't necessarily agree with. Our perspectives have changed over the years; what used to work for us just

doesn't seem to fit anymore. The structure has to be reassessed, modified. Our needs are changing, the plans have to change, the building activities continue. By the way, we all know that change is often necessary but difficult, right?

What are we building? "A community of love." What the heck is that? If we took a poll among the 100+ people here today, we might get a myriad of different answers. Some would say a community of love is one where the members take care of their own – and we do. We take meals to the sick of QAC; we shovel snow for our weaker members; we hold each other during times of tragedy and joy; we pray for one another and believe in healing. Another opinion is that community of love means outreach to the greater community, to minister to others outside QAC. We're going to be recognizing a group of women today who do that very thing. Some would say it means acceptance and inclusivity, drawing people in to share in this faith community. Two weeks ago, Laurie gave an inspiring testimony about her experience at being embraced here. Marilyn has said that, for her, this community of love means that most aspects of her life are intertwined with the members of QAC. Community of love can mean that we gather together each week to worship and deepen our relationship with God and Jesus. Or, that we demonstrate love by donating generously to every campaign and fund that the Archdiocese asks of us. Of course, all these answers are correct, and that's why we love it here. But we're still in the process of "the build."

Another concept relating to "building" is "planting." And, with our focus on words today, keep that in mind as Deacon Greg speaks to us about the parable we heard in today's Gospel.

Greg

The Four Soils (Matthew 13:1-23)

We all love stories and I'm sure most of our parents read stories to us as children. Stories are passed down from generation to generation. Jesus often taught people by telling stories - parables. But he didn't simply tell stories to entertain or to get people's attention.

Jesus told parables because He wanted to change lives!

Parables tell a story using something we see every day to help us understand a spiritual truth that we can't see with our eyes. When Jesus taught in parables, He used things with which the people of His day were familiar. If Jesus were here teaching with parables today, they would be different because our culture is different. There might be fewer stories about farming, and more stories about computers or texting!

Most of the people that Jesus was speaking to were farmers. They understood all about seeds and plants because they grew their own fruits and vegetables. Today, not all of us know about planting seeds, since we go to the grocery store to buy all of our food.

All seeds contain nutrients and energy inside a hard, protective coating. First the seed is buried in good, soft, warm soil, where it sends out a little root that goes down into the soil.

The root starts to drink up the nutrients which gives the tiny plant more energy - enough to start growing - and then a tiny stalk starts to reach up out of the ground. With the sun shining on the stalk, and nutrients going into the root from the rain and soil, more roots grow, and the plant begins to thrive. And the parable we just heard in today's Gospel is more about the ground than the sower.

Many of the people who were listening to Jesus were farmers who knew a lot about dirt and soil. Jesus spoke to them using words and word pictures that they could understand. He wasn't teaching them something new about farming but He was using what they understood about farming to teach them something they didn't know about the kingdom of God. What Jesus was saying was the seed is the gospel - the good news about Jesus.

The soils are the hearts of the people who make a choice about the message. The condition of a person's heart can be compared to the different kinds of soils that received the seed.

The path – where many people have walked, and the dirt is well worn, is harder than the ground on either side of it. The more people walk on it, the more “packed down” it becomes. Some people hear the truth, but like hardened paths, **they** do not let it sink into their hearts.

The rocky places – where the hard rocks block the roots. These people hear the message with great joy, but they don't let it take root. They seem to be happy to hear about Jesus and His great love, but **they** do not let it sink into their hearts. On the outside, they may express great enthusiasm, but inwardly, they do not carefully consider it. When they face pressure or bad circumstances, they quickly forget about God's word.

The thorns – grow up and crowd out the plants. Number one rule about pulling weeds is that **you must get the roots out!** Otherwise, the weeds grow back. Weeds are strong and forceful and wherever there are weeds, they take over the good plants. These people hear God's Word and start to grow, but they soon become worried about the problems (weeds) of daily living. They may think if they only had more money and more “things” they would be happy. These desires take up all the person's time and energy, just like the weeds steal all the nutrients from the good plants.

Finally, good soil - where the seed thrived. Farming experts know just what kind of soil is needed for their crops. They add the right kind of fertilizer (vitamins/nutrients) so their plants can grow large and healthy and produce good fruits and vegetables. If done right, a handful of seeds will produce bushels full of good things! Those of us who have grown zucchini or tomatoes know that for a fact. These are the people who heard God's word and believed it. Those who put their trust in Jesus - whose hearts received the message of the kingdom.

Jesus is describing **our** inner geography - these are the various landscapes of the human heart. **We are rarely** just one type of soil. The four soils are descriptive of how we live and relate to others and to God. Jesus describes the consequences of each kind of life.

Joan

So, continue to think about “good soil” while we return to our QAC mission statement.

The second thing that we proclaim that we are willing to do: “be holy people”. Now, just like different types of soil – and all soils are good in one way or another – there are different types of people, and all are good. There is goodness in everyone. Each of us is good because we truly try to live our lives the way we think we should. But, to be HOLY people – well, that’s more difficult. That requires that we live the way God thinks we should. God gave Moses a written set of words, or directives, that we call the Ten Commandments. God wants us to strive for holiness so much that He came to live among us, to teach us through parables and through other verbal lessons, and by being a role model. But we are human, with human limitations, and may never achieve absolute holiness. However, every time we repeat this mission statement we proclaim that we are **willing to try**.

We shouldn’t let ourselves get discouraged, though, because, as Deacon Greg is about to point out, each one of us still has at least a chance at holiness – a chance at the kingdom.

Greg

The landing places for the seed represent every kind of person, every sort of human situation. There’s no way for any of us to opt out of this story, so this story is about everybody. **It suggests that everybody has at least a chance at the kingdom.**

As different as the four soils are they all hold two things in common - seeds and the sower. The sower sows the same seeds in all four soils with equal toil, equal hope, equal generosity, without evaluation of the soil’s quality or potential. There is no soil left unsown; no ground declared undeserving of the sower’s seeds. This is not about the quality of dirt, it’s about the quality of God, the Divine sower. We want to judge what kind of dirt we are, but God simply wants to sow divine life in ours. We are sown with the seeds of God - no life, no person, no soil is left unsown.

Just like planting actual seeds, the message of the kingdom grows gradually. We don’t plant a seed and see a plant the next day. **True growth takes time.** And sometimes when we plant seeds, we see different kinds of things that actually grow. Some produce lots of fruit, and some produce little. **Even soil that produces a small crop is “good.”**

I listen to Mark Webber’s *Garden Talk*’ on Saturday morning on the way to the office. Mark is always suggesting people contact the Ohio State University department that tests soils. So, we can dig up a handful of dirt from our yard and send it off to OSU where they put it under a microscope and see what it contains. And in a few weeks, we get a report

telling us how good our soil is for growing things...if there are the right nutrients in our yard, or if we need to add something to make the soil just right.

That's very helpful for growing actual seeds and plants, but how can you test the soil of the heart? We can look at the "fruit" in our lives - the spiritual fruit from the Holy Spirit - chastity, faithfulness, generosity, gentleness, goodness, joy, kindness, love, modesty, patience, peace, self-control. Is any of this fruit in our lives? If so, we know that God's word has taken root in our heart. We trust in Jesus, so His Spirit lives in us.

A plant does not "decide" when to bear fruit - it just happens. And we can't "decide" when we're going to bear spiritual fruit. We aren't responsible to make the fruit, but we are responsible to keep the soil in good condition.

Joan

Why do we strive to be holy people? Because "God calls us to be." Think intently about those words for a few moments. (Pause three seconds) "God calls us to be." (Pause three seconds.) Have you ever heard it said that a person who enters religious life has "heard the call" or "answered the call"? When we pay attention enough to hear God calling us, it means we are ordained to do something. In this case, we are ordained to be holy people. We are chosen by God. It is our vocation. Not our occupation or our profession. Our vocation. And every single week we proclaim that we are willing to answer that call, even with our human weaknesses. Weak? Yes. But, united together as a community of love, we become stronger.

Let us challenge ourselves to not just "recite" these words each Sunday. Let us speak out loud and proud to proclaim our willingness to fulfill the mission of Queen of Apostles Community.

Greg

Parables are not meant to test human intelligence, but to test the heart's willingness to surrender to the generosity of God. The seeds are God's Word in its many expressions. But we have to do something with this gift - it simply is not enough just to hear the Word of God. We have to let it grow within us to such an extent that we are covered in its foliage. It is simply not enough to go to Church. **We have to be Church. We have to be People of the Word. We are not responsible to make the seed grow! We are just asked to spread the seed.**

Deacon Greg Cecere & Joan Ivory

July 16, 2017

References:

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