



*Homily – 15th Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)<sup>i</sup>*

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*Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels  
Los Angeles, California  
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My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

It is so good to be home!

I just came back from Rome this week, from the celebration of the imposition of the pallium for the new archbishops.

It was a beautiful ceremony with Pope Benedict XVI. It was especially beautiful because, as you all know, it was also the 60th anniversary of his ordination to the priesthood.

So it was a great celebration for the universal Church, as we all gathered together with the Holy Father representing many archdioceses from all over the world. There were 40 archbishops there from all over the world.

I want to thank all of you for your prayers. And I want to thank all the people of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles who were praying for me during these past weeks as we celebrated this special moment in the life of the Church, in the life of the Archdiocese, and in my personal life.

It was a wonderful pilgrimage and close to 300 people joined me from Los Angeles. It was a very spiritual time. We were able to celebrate Mass at some of the basilicas in Rome. At St. Mary Major we were able to ask Our Blessed Mother for her intercession. We also celebrated Mass at St. Peter's Basilica, at the altar of the Chair of St. Peter.

We also went to Assisi and we had the blessing of celebrating Mass at the Church of Our Lady of the Angels in the Portiuncula.

This is where everything really began for the city of Los Angeles and for our beautiful Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels. And that's where St. Francis of Assisi received his vocation in that area and started his mission of rebuilding the Church, as he was called to do by God.

So it was a really beautiful spiritual time for all of us who were there and I hope for everyone in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. Our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI,

sends his Apostolic Blessing to all the people in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. So today, in a special way, I bring you the greetings and the blessings of the Holy Father.

And, so you can make sure that I got the Pallium, I decided to wear it today! So, this is it! So it was a good trip. I got a new stole. It is a beautiful liturgical vestment — that as you know, signifies the unity of the Archbishops with the Holy Father, and reminds each one of us that we have to become the Good Shepherd in our Archdioceses.

And I am grateful that we had the company of the prayers and the support of all the people of the Archdiocese and obviously you were in my prayers in a special way.

These readings today tell us in a beautiful way that our relationship with God is something that is living and growing. The readings tell us that we must cultivate that relationship so that our faith in Jesus Christ bears good fruits.

In this passage of the Gospel that we just heard, Jesus speaks to us in that parable of the sower.

It is beautiful to hear Jesus talking to us in parables.

Sometimes he talks to us in a direct way — telling us exactly what we are supposed to do to be faithful to the demands of our Christian vocation.

But sometimes he talks to us in parables. He talks to the apostles and in talking to the apostles he talks to all of us. He uncovers for us the mysteries of the Kingdom of God —how God works in our world and in our lives, in our souls.

He does it in that beautiful way, that simple way — so that we can really understand what he is talking about and so that we can find a way to be faithful to our call.

Really, the parables are the heart of his Gospel.

In his parables he uses examples that are familiar to us from ordinary life. And that's the way he teaches us about the extraordinary realities of our Christian lives.

The teaching of the parables is something that we can perfectly understand and that we can apply in our lives.

Today's parable is a beautiful parable that we know well – the parable of the sower.

And in the parable we know that Jesus is the sower. We know that the seed that he sows is the Word of God. The seed is his Gospel.

But the central part of the parable is not necessarily the sower or the seed. It is the soil.

The soil is the human heart. The heart of each one of us.

The seed of God's Word and his love for us must fall on rich soil to nourish it.

Everything depends on how prepared our hearts are to receive his Gospel. Everything depends on and what kind of response we are prepared to make to God's grace in our lives.

So today we have to ask ourselves: How is the soil of my soul, my heart? How do I receive the Word of God?

And if we are sincere, we have to accept that the soil — our soul and our heart — is not totally well prepared.

Sometimes we can be like that hard path in the parable. Because maybe we are not attentive enough to our spiritual lives. So the Word of God doesn't really sink in.

Sometimes, maybe the soil of our hearts can be like rocky ground. Yes, we might be enthusiastic, but there is always the tendency of laziness or to approach things in a superficial way. The Word cannot take root in us.

Sometimes we can also be like thorny ground. We can have the temptation of getting too caught up in the cares of the world. We can be too concerned about being comfortable. When that happens, it suffocates the love of God inside us.

So today my brothers and sisters, let us try to ask for the grace of God — to be always prepared in the best possible way to receive the Word of God in our souls. That we can really bear fruit — the fruits of love and mercy in our homes, in our workplaces, in our society.

Let me just offer two practical suggestions.

The first one: It seems to me, as we see the beauty of God's love for us, maybe what we need to do, as a first suggestion, is to try to be more cheerful in lives.

What we get from society is, most of the time, negative things. And we have challenges. We see our own weaknesses. So we can fall into the temptation of sadness.

But if we really understand, as St. Paul reminds us in the second reading of today's Mass, that we are children of God, don't you think that we should be always happy?!

We have to be happy people. Because we are sons and daughters of God. God is our loving and merciful father. He is with us all the time in the middle of those sad circumstances of our society.

So try to wake up every morning, every day, giving thanks to God — because he is our Father and we are his sons and daughters. Let us try to be joyful every single day of our lives.

And then the second suggestion is also very simple.

Maybe the way we can really prepare the soil of our soul is to be more generous in small sacrifices.

It can be little things in the way we eat or talk or spend our time. Or the way, especially, that we make time to be with God or others.

Little acts of sacrifice — that take us away from our selfishness — and make our lives a service to God and to others.

Maybe it is a practical resolution of thinking, Well, I know this person that I have to deal with every day —at home, at work, in the circumstances of my life — that I have a hard time with.

Let's try this week to offer up a small sacrifice of smiling at that person! Saying a kind word to somebody that is going through a difficult situation.

Just making life better for others. Small sacrifices that really prepare our soul to be open to the grace of God.

Those little sacrifices will help us to grow in humility. It will soften the soil of our heart so that the Word of Christ can grow more richly in our souls. So that we can yield the fruits that Jesus expects from us.

Each day, my brothers and sisters, we have to be tending the soil of our hearts. We have to be receptive, open, cheerful, with a spirit of penance and sacrifice to the beauty of God's love in our lives.

May the Blessed Virgin Mary, who made herself a rich soil for God's Word through her obedience of faith, help us to listen, to be receptive to God's Word and to be rich in works of love in our lives — thirty-fold or sixty or one hundred-fold.

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<sup>i</sup> Readings: Isa. 55:10–11; Ps. 65:10–14; Rom. 8:18–23; Matt. 13:1–23.