

July 12, 2020 | 15th Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)

[IS 55:10-11](#)

[PS 65:10-14](#)

[ROM 8:18-23](#)

[MT 13:1-23 \(or 1-9\)](#)

By Dianne Bergant, CSA

The pandemic that has grasped the entire world has thrown light on several issues previously present but not addressed adequately, issues of justice that can no longer be ignored. Chief among them seems to be the underlying cause of the disproportionate number of COVID-19 cases of people in certain segments of society. Once again we are faced with the disastrous sin of racism. Only time will show whether or not we really want to cure this blight that has infected our minds, our hearts, and our souls.

There is another facet of life that has become obvious to us because of the pandemic, a facet no less important. That is the impact we make on the rest of the natural world. Quarantine has not only protected us from infection. It has also protected the world of which we are apart from the way we often trample, scorch, and devour it. Air is cleaner, water is clearer. In a relatively short time, the natural world appears to have cleaned itself up – And without our help.

Today's readings tell us something about this world that we take for granted – until it inconveniences us. As Isaiah speaks about the mysterious power of the word of God, he employs a natural process as a dynamic metaphor. He says that the waters that shower upon us touch the life within us, teasing it to bloom and to bring forth what we need to continue with life. What would we do without the rain? Do we realize that it sustains us and that we do not sustain it? This same mystery of life and growth is painted in clear lines in the psalm response. There we read that Earth brings forth food with an abundance we cannot measure. And what have we done to Earth, the mother that feeds us from her own substance?

Paul is somewhat rapturous when he tries to describe the glory that awaits us in the future. He characterizes the pain we go through as we are ripped away from this life and are born anew in the next as labor-pains. This is an ancient metaphor found frequently in the scriptures to identify pain that is literally life-giving. Paul goes on. But it is not only we humans who will be transformed as if born anew, but creation will as well. We should not be surprised by this claim. If we are transformed then everything to which we are intimately connected will also be transformed. And there is nothing to which we are more intimately connected than the natural world of which we are apart. We come from Earth and are totally dependent on it for everything. The world follows laws established by God. When we tamper with those laws, our tampering becomes part of the operating system and nature simply follows the course that we have set. All of Earth flourishes or dies together.

Finally, in telling the parable of the sower, Jesus shows the sensitivity that he has regarding the arable possibility of soil. He knows what various types of soil can hold and what they might yield. Taking such matters into consideration, he describes what one could expect of diverse soils. Though the parable was meant to direct the focus of the hearers to the quality of their own cooperation with the word of God, their comprehension of the parable rested on the clarity of its manner of expression. Jesus the Carpenter probably knew from experience more about diverse kinds of soil than the average city-dweller today. Members of a society such as his knew how to read the skies, the wind, and the soil.

While we are not sure what we will do about racism, we are probably even less sure of or even concerned about what we are going to do about violating the Earth. If COVID-19 has taught us anything it is that we are not in charge of the natural world, as we thought we were. Nor will we probably be able to destroy the virus. 'Normal' will mean that we have made the necessary adjustments to it. When will we finally learn to live carefully within Earth's systems as the rain does? Has the pain we have endured through this crisis transformed us into a new way of living? Have we learned to walk gently on this Earth, over its various forms of soil? Are these even questions that we ask?

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