

July 16, 2017 The Seed Homily: Brothers and sisters, arguably, one of the greatest artists of the nineteenth century was the renowned and beloved Dutch painter, Vincent Van Gogh. A rather tragic figure, Van Gogh is perhaps best remembered by many of us today for severing his right ear in a moment of despair. Back in the 1970's his life was immortalized by the American songwriter, Don Mclean, who penned the song "*Vincent*" in his honor.

Van Gogh was a man of deep faith and many of his paintings afforded the artist an opportunity to capture on canvas his often profound insights on the gospel of Christ. One of his most famous oil paintings, "*the Sower*" is undoubtedly inspired by today's gospel reading, the parable of the sower and the seed. His interpretation is noteworthy if only because he sheds light on an often neglected theme of the parable: the extraordinary generosity of the sower. With reckless abandon, he scatters seed everywhere, oblivious to the inevitable waste. In biblical times, seed was expensive and not, as is common today, wasted. One thinks of the many obstacles facing the farmer planting seeds: scorching winds, locusts, thorns, birds, rocky ground and worms. The artist may have had in mind the words of St. Paul: "Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly and whoever gives generously will reap generously". (2 Cor.9:6)

In two of our readings today, the seed takes center stage. In the Book of the prophet Isaiah, God is depicted as a sower. The seed represents his word. "So shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth. My word shall not return to me void, achieving my will for which I have sent it". (Is.55:11)

In the gospel (Mt. 13:1-9), Jesus identifies himself with the sower of the seed in the parable. Recognizing that some of the seed will not fall on fertile soil, the planter is undeterred and scatters the good seed, the Word of God, confident of the harvest to come.

In his commentary on the parable, the noted German scholar Joachim Jeremias offers his readers words of caution and hope. He writes, "To human eyes much of the labor of the sower of the seed may seem futile and fruitless, resulting in failure. But Jesus is full of confidence. God brings from hopeless beginnings the glorious end he has promised ... a bountiful harvest". Our labors in the field will be blessed. A minister of the gospel need not be concerned about immediate results. God's word will bear abundant fruit in due time.

The current state of the Church alarms many of the faithful today. Some may be tempted to give in to despair, or, even worse, walk away from the Church for good. The bountiful harvest at the end of the parable must awaken our slumbering faith and assure us of the triumph of the sower who is Christ.

Lastly, the Eucharist reminds us of the power of the seed. In John's gospel, Jesus speaks of the seed in view of his impending saving death. "Unless the grain of wheat falls to the earth, it remains just a grain of wheat, but if it dies, it produces much fruit". (Jn. 12:24)

"Whoever has ears ought to hear". (Mt. 13:9)

Amen!