

15th Sunday of Ordinary Time, A – July 12, 2026 – Very Rev. Bryan W. Jerabek, J.C.L.
Cathedral of St. Paul, Birmingham, Ala. – 7:15, 8:30, and 11:00am Sunday Masses – 635 words

This Sunday, the Church reminds us that the Lord wants us to be full of confidence in him. Listen again to the words of the first reading: “my word *shall not* return to me void”. God’s word is always effective, it always does something. Consider this in light of the gospel parable: even when the seed fell on unsuitable ground, yet it still sprouted for a while! If that’s how powerful his word is, then we should strive to be as good ground, so that it will really take root in us and make a splendid effect in our lives.

The Word of God is first of all a person: our Lord Jesus Christ. Everything he said and did was for our instruction; he is the embodiment of the truth and the perfect model of living it out. Well, where, then, do we find Jesus? We find him in his Church – in word and sacrament. Here we speak of the “word” with a different nuance, as a body of teaching given to and handed down by the Church; we speak of Scripture and Tradition. It all points us to Christ. And he reaches us in powerful ways through the sacraments.

So let’s go back to the gospel parable and consider how our souls have been, at times, unsuitable ground – yet the Word was effective all the same. Perhaps there was that retreat that left us with a new lease on life – for a few days, before we went back to our old ways. There was that confession that brought a great deal of consolation – but then we were soon enough in sin again. Maybe there was that Mass where we heard something in the preaching that convicted us – yet by the ride home, we had forgotten it.

All those things – the new lease on life, the consolation, and the conviction – were real; they were effects of the Word which is “living and effective”, as the Letter to the Hebrews says (4:12). The Word of God did what the Word of God does – always. The lack, the defect, was subjective in nature – it was that our souls were not prepared to benefit to the full from the Word’s effect. And the Lord explains in the gospel that it is things like ignorance, lack of fortitude, and worldliness that hinder his Word’s effect.

How, then, can we overcome our ignorance; how can we grow in fortitude; how, indeed, can we be freed from worldliness? Well, the parable was about a garden: let’s approach that image with a certain simplicity. How does a gardener successfully yield a harvest? He tends to it every day. He is patient. He invests time. To put it even more simply, a big part of it is showing up – each day. The transformation then happens gradually.

Saint Paul, in the second reading, gave us a reality check, that helps further contextualize our daily task. “All creation is groaning with labor pains.... we also groan within ourselves”. The process of transformation that results in our total redemption by God is slow and often arduous. Some days, it seems nothing happens. But experienced gardeners say that there are days, too, when you can actually watch the plants grow.

Daily meditation on God’s word – whether through reflection on the life of Christ, reading the scriptures, listening to holy teachings, or devoutly receiving the sacraments – gradually cures us of our former ignorance; it makes us grow in strength, resilience, and fortitude amidst the arduous grind of this world; and, little by little, it helps us to be freed from our worldly cares. We pray for the grace to be more patient and steady cultivators of our souls, so that God’s word, which shall not return to him void, may send forth deep roots and bear much fruit.