

The Seeds that Fall on Good Ground

The New York Times tells the story about a New York City commuter, who had just gotten off his train on a cold winter evening last winter, and was hurrying to walk the few blocks to his apartment, planning on making himself a nice hot drink as soon as he got home. As he rounded the corner to his street, he heard a young girl's voice cry out: "Get your hot chocolate here! ... Hot chocolate here!" Just ahead of the commuter was a table with a large thermos of hot cocoa, a can of whipped cream, some miniature marshmallows and a stack of plastic cups.

The commuter was impressed – a different take on the summertime lemonade stand! As he approached the table, the delighted 7-year-old proprietor asked if he preferred whipped cream or marshmallows. Placing his order, he took out his wallet and asked how much she was charging.

"Oh, it's free," she laughed!

The confused commuter looked at the girl's mother who was standing nearby... . "You're giving it away?"

"Yes, it's free," her mom said with a smile. "My daughter got so many gifts at Christmas, we wanted her to learn to give back to the community, and thought this might be a good way. So, enjoy!"

When I first read that story, I thought it was just a cute little story; but reflecting on it, it dawned on me that it touches on today's Gospel very powerfully.

Jesus is speaking to a large crowd, which includes his disciples and some Pharisees... . Using the parable of the sower, the seeds and the soil, Jesus is pointing out that God's Word – God's Message – God's Voice often falls dead on its soil: it is trampled, it dries up, it is drowned, it does not grow... .

The signs God gives us in our day-to-day lives – we can miss; they can remain unseen, unheard, unfelt, untouched and so: powerless. God gives us signs day after day, trying to get our attention: a flower, a thought, a dream, a child, a person, a beautiful feeling, sometimes even pain or a crisis.

But so often we live as those who *'have eyes and see not,'* or as those who *'have ears and hear not.'*

No better example of this blindness – this deafness are the Pharisees standing there listening to Jesus: day after day, Jesus is teaching a message of love and sharing and forgiveness and inclusion. He is healing people, forgiving people, liberating people...; and yet the religious leaders are so entrenched in their ideologies – rituals, laws, customs – so set in their ways, that: rather than rejoicing that someone is healed! ...they criticize that Jesus healed on the Sabbath...! They just don't get it!

On the other hand, the mother, on that cold evening in New York City last winter, does get it... she is nourishing the soil of her little daughter's heart to hear God's Word: 'Yes, we are all brothers and sisters! We're all children of God and we must think of others. We show our gratitude to God for our blessings by reaching out to others...!' My bet is that, the 7-year-old proprietor of that Hot Chocolate Stand will never forget the life lessons learned on that cold winter evening and neither will the commuter who was the recipient of that hot chocolate with marshmallows!

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My sisters and brothers, as we – most of us citizens of the United States – gather here this weekend in prayer, God is trying to get our attention in a big way... Since October, over 57,000 unaccompanied children – some as young as 5-years-old – have migrated from their Central American homes, through Mexico, to our border – literally running for their lives.

The whole world is watching and waiting to see how the richest and most powerful nation in the world will handle this crisis.

'IF we have eyes to see and ears to hear...' it's a no-brainer: we must come to the aid of these hurting children of God!

Brothers and sisters:

- ❖ Yes... the roots of these problems are deep and complicated;
- ❖ Yes... our Immigration System is broken;
- ❖ Yes... long term solutions must be developed, etc., etc. etc. ...

BUT: first things first: we must embrace and love and heal these precious little ones in our midst!

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But: isn't it amazing how ideology, polarization, business-as-usual politics, and just plain old selfishness can blind us from simply doing what is right! How embarrassing and scandalous those fear-full and hate-filled protesters who blocked the entrance of the bus filled with immigrant children from coming into San Diego and forced it to turn around (What an impression that must have made on the children!) and how some members of Congress are trying to score political points on the back of these children... not an awful lot different than those Pharisees, standing there in their religiosity, missing everything that Jesus is saying and doing in their midst. The Pharisees who, in fact were so threatened by the Good News, that they ultimately had Jesus killed!

Our Catholic Church joined with others – the Human Development and Justice + Peace Committees of the USCCB, Catholic Parishes along the border, Catholic Charities and numbers of grass-roots groups – is on the front lines of this crisis both at the border and in the violet neighborhoods in Central America. On June 25th, Bishop Mark Seitz, from the Diocese of El Paso and a member of the US Bishops Committee on Migration, testified before Congress. I'd like to share the recommendations offered by our Catholic Bishops:

1. Address the issue of unaccompanied-child migration as a humanitarian crisis requiring cooperation from **all** branches of the US government and appropriate the necessary funding to respond to the crisis in a holistic and child protection focused manner.
2. Adopt policies to ensure that unaccompanied migrant children receive appropriate child welfare services, legal assistance, and access to immigration protection where appropriate.
3. Require that a 'Best Interest of the Child Standard' be applied in immigration proceedings governing unaccompanied alien children.
4. Examine root causes driving this forced migration situation such as violence from non-state actors in countries of origin, as well as a lack of citizen security and adequate child protection mechanisms in those countries.
5. Appropriate to \$2.28 billion for fiscal year 2015 for care of unaccompanied children, consistent with the Administration's request.

What can we do? Certainly encourage Congress to act. (!!) and support relief organizations. As the local press has mentioned, Syracuse might become a host city to some of these children: the Sisters of St. Francis' former convent on Court and Grant Streets has already been evaluated as a potential setting. What an opportunity it might be... What an opportunity to do exactly what Pope Francis has called for: using our empty building to house the poorest of the poor! What an opportunity IF the soil in Syracuse is enriched enough to receive the seeds of grace. I hope you agree with me, that it is!

Finally, our readings today are especially meaningful in the midst of summer when all nature is alive and growing towards harvest. We might take some time to look at the fields in our midst bursting with vitality and see for ourselves that:

"The seed that falls on good ground will yield a rich harvest!"

Thomas Merton, in his book: *New Seeds of Contemplation*, reflects on the parable of the seeds:

"Every moment and every event of every person's life on earth plants something in their soul. For just as wind carries thousands of winged seeds, so each moment brings with it germs of a spiritual vitality that come to rest imperceptibly in the minds and will of each one of us. Most of these unnumbered seeds perish and are lost because people are not prepared to receive them; for such seeds as these, cannot spring up anywhere except in the good soil of freedom, spontaneity and love."

Amen!

NOTE: Network, a Catholic social justice lobby says: "The House just passed \$285 Billion in tax breaks for corporations, But securing \$3.7 billion for unaccompanied children seeking refuge from violence seems too steep!" Please consider letting your representatives in the House and Senate know your position by using the Network site to communicate to your representatives as a concrete follow-up on Fr. Fred's Homily. Go to the 'Announcement' page of our All Saints Parish website (www.allsaintssyracuse.org) and use the link provided there.