

## IS THERE EVER A PLACE FOR WEEDS? EVER?

Do you remember last week's gospel about the sower who sowed seed and some fell on the footpath or in the thorns? I was thinking after the fact that rather than just being receptive soil as the point of the parable, Jesus was trying to tell us that each person's soul, each person's life is all these different kinds of soil—right in the one person. Sometimes things get choked off in me and sometimes I yield a rich harvest by God's grace. But in me there all these different soils. I am decidedly a mixed bag—so to speak. Perhaps we are all a mixed bag.

Yesterday was the feast of Saint Mary Magdalen. We don't know a lot about her. She is described as a woman out of whom Jesus cast seven demons. One thinks of the seven deadly sins and the compulsions or addictions with each of them. It sounds like the Magdalen had more than her share. But then she encounters Jesus and as He forgives her and casts out the demons, He frees her. She is restored to her original innocence and undergoes a true change of heart. So much so that she becomes one of his followers and she is mentioned as a companion of the blessed Mother several different times, especially at Calvary. Mary Magdalen goes to Joseph of Arimathea's tomb where they lay Jesus to rest and she watches til the stone is rolled in place. She is back before dawn that first Easter to finish cleaning and washing his body only to find the tomb open and empty.

She runs to tell the apostles. Peter and John come to the tomb but see no one and then leave. She stays and then Jesus himself appears but she doesn't recognize him. Strange. She doesn't recognize the very one she seeks and the very one she loves above all. How can that be? Grief does that sometimes. Preoccupation does that. Despondency does that sometimes. But then Jesus says her name: Mary! And in a nanosecond she is transformed from despondency to hope and joy. She clearly heard him say her name. And in that moment she knows it is Jesus.

Have you ever heard your name spoken like that clearly and out loud but no one else heard anything? Ever happen in your bedroom? Ever happen in your car? Ever happen in Church? What was that? Did that really happen? Because that does really happen. What did you do? Probably nothing. Then you let the memory drift into forgetfulness. But the next time? Say: "Yes Lord!" or "Speak Lord!" "If today you hear his voice harden not your hearts!" The Lord desires a relationship with us where He can communicate and we can both listen and speak. Even those who knew him best and loved him most struggled to learn to relate to the risen Jesus in a new way. Us too.

Saint Paul, in his second letter to the Christians at Corinth speaks about a moment of his own relationship with the Lord. It is the 12<sup>th</sup> chapter. Just listen:

*"So that I should not get above myself, I was given a thorn in the flesh, a messenger from Satan to harass me and prevent me from getting above myself. I have three times pleaded with the Lord, that it might leave me; but he has answered me, 'My grace is enough for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' It is, then, about my weaknesses that I am happiest of all to boast, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. And that is why I am glad of weaknesses, insults, constraints, persecutions and distress for Christ's sake. For it is when I am weak that I am strong."*

Weaknesses, insults, constraints, persecutions and distress as well as disappointments, unfulfilled dreams, unfair obstacles. What are these things? They are the weeds of life. And we all

have weeds. Some sown by an enemy; some sown by ourselves. And because we all have weeds, Jesus is at pains to try to teach us how we are to deal with them. It is a pretty important lesson because the reality is so common. Today we encounter a variety of responses in our society. There is anger and raised voices, public demonstrations, finger-pointing, attempts to silence or shut down, efforts to remove those we find offensive or bothersome or troublesome. A lot of this is the “Get rid of them and the world will be a much better place” school of thought. That is what St. Paul was talking about in his own life. It is not Our Lord’s way. Sometimes we beat ourselves up because we are not all we believe we should be. We beat ourselves up because we aren’t better, aren’t further along at this point in our lives than we are. We wish all of the weeds could just be pulled up and cast off and then we would be our best selves.

That is not what Jesus suggests. His suggestion is to recognize the weeds, know they are there, keep your eye on them BUT expend your energy NOT in trying to remove these things. We are to use our energy to strive to become the best wheat, the best harvest we can be. Feed that which is good in yourself—and others. Don’t concentrate on what isn’t. Concentrate on what can be and is to be. Keep looking forward. Keep focused on the good and do not allow yourself to be derailed by the bad. It is hard to do but he promises assistance—the Spirit, the sacraments, the support and encouragement of the believing community.

Whether it is Mary Magdalen Paul of Tarsus or any of the apostles the way of Jesus is new and different. It offers an approach which is life-changing and life-transforming. It is something I really try to do. I find it has worked for me—pretty much. Not perfectly. Not always. But pretty often. And it has brought happiness and some peace—which we all could use. Why not give it a try and let go of the unproductive ways you may have been responding to things in life.