

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, one God, Amen.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, who is in charge of your life? Who will provide for you? For some, they would say "I am in charge of my life." They work hard, providing for themselves and for their families, they struggle on through life. "I am doing this, I am living," they tell themselves. But then tragedy hits them - whether through illness or ageing, eventually they can no longer support themselves, relying on savings, family, charity or the state to keep them going; perhaps they would have considered an early death to have been a mercy for them?

Who is in charge of your life? Who will provide for you? Perhaps you will then turn to say, "God is." You may remember the words of the Lord from the Mount,

Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?

These are strong words, comforting words. The Lord promises to provide all that we need. "God is in charge, God is working in my life, God will provide," such people can tell themselves.

Yet, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, this second position, too, is not correct. It has a partial truth to it but it is not what the Lord says to each of us. The Lord says, "do not *worry* about your life," but he still expects us to act. In this morning's Liturgy we will be offered the food and drink of Life and yet we cannot simply remain in Church and expect to go on living. "Do not worry" he says, not "do not act."

The call of the Christian is not to rely solely on oneself nor solely on God: it is to let the Spirit of God live within us so that the two merge and become one. We see this in the Apostle Paul's enigmatic statement, "it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me:" he, together with Christ, working for the sake of the Gospel.

Do not, my brothers and sisters, rely on yourself nor on God but cooperate with him that you may be a vessel of his Gospel, the Good News of his Kingdom. Let Christ be alive within you - not the dead Christ of books and learning from two millennia ago but the risen Christ whose life shines out within our hearts, whose presence is felt by others by our being present with them.

The Lord, in his great love for his disciples, taught them in parables and this message of cooperation - what you will often find called *synergy*, meaning working together, in writings - comes out in today's Gospel reading. We think of parables as an illustration to make things clear: this can be true but is not the whole story. In today's Gospel reading the

disciples come to him later and asked what this parable meant: they need an explanation which he gives to them. This is the first parable the Lord gives in the Evangelist Luke's Gospel and the disciples have not yet had time to learn: for parables are to illustrate an idea to those who are initiated, to those who have "ears to hear" as the Lord puts it at the end of today's reading.

My brothers and sisters, do you have ears to hear? Do I? Do we soften our hearts through prayer and through the Church services so that we allow Christ to live within us? Are we trying to be disciples of the risen Christ? Is it, for you and for me, no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me?

"To you it has been given," says the Lord to you, and he says to me, "to know the secrets of the kingdom of God; but for others they are in parables, so that seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand." We have been offered a great opportunity by the Lord to come closer to him. Through baptism and chrismation, through confession and the Eucharist, we have become initiates of his grace.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, the Lord sows the seed throughout the world, throughout our country, throughout our community, our parish. The Lord tells us "the seed is the word of God." Not a book, not a teaching, not a philosophy, not an ethic, not a concept, not a memory, not something to be grasped, not an ideology: the seed is the Word of God, the seed is Jesus Christ, who comes into the hearts of each of us freely, without cost. What differs from person to person is how Christ is received.

For some receive him like a *path* where their hearts are too hard for the Lord to penetrate. He is waiting for them to allow him in and they believe they can do it on their own. Is this you? Is this me? Such people can even wrap themselves in religion – call it Orthodoxy even! – and yet they believe they can get to heaven by their own strength. "Me, I will make myself a saint!" they delude themselves and the word of God is eaten up from their hearts and takes no place in them. They are obsessed by rules and regulations, fasts and prayer rules, and beat themselves up when they miss the standard. They consider themselves the "protector of the law" and take delight in pointing out where another person does not meet the standard. For them the Lord says,

And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

For others receive Christ as *rocky ground*. For a time they are alive to the Gospel, they may pray and attend Church, but it has no root. When trials come along, as they come along in all our lives though perhaps to differing extents, their faith is broken. They are, perhaps, like Job's wife. Job was a righteous man from whom the Lord allowed the devil to take away his possessions and health and his wife said, "but say a word against the Lord and die!" These people are happy with God when their lives go well but struggle with hardship

and suffering; they want to put their trust in God but only when he acts according to their own desires.

Others, still, receive him as *thorny ground*. They may hear merely the words but are then distracted by this life. They are, perhaps, like the rich young ruler who knows the Law, "All these things I have kept from my youth," he tells the Lord who responds, "You still lack one thing. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." At this, the rich young ruler, like those on thorny ground, becomes very sorrowful, for he is very rich, at least in the terms of this life.

Are you, my brothers and sisters in Christ, a path? Or rocks? Or thorns? Am I? Do these descriptions echo within our hearts? Do our hearts echo because they are empty?

For others, they receive Christ into their hearts like seeds in *good soil*. They cooperate with the actions of God so that it is no longer they who live but Christ who lives in them. They accept the blessings of God in their lives but do not become discouraged when trials and adversities come their way. When faced with the words of Job's wife at times of trial, "but say a word against the Lord and die!" they reply as did Job, "You have spoken as one of the foolish women speaks. If we accepted good things from the Lord's hand, shall we not endure evil things?"

Those who are the good soil receive the Word of God, Christ, into their hearts and return to the Sower the Word a hundredfold that he may sow again where he wills. By their cooperation with God others come into belief in God. This is the meaning of the famous word of St Seraphim of Sarov, "Acquire the Spirit of Peace and a thousand souls around you will be saved:" active participation with Christ that the Word of God may live within the hearts of those around us.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, who is in charge of your life? Who will provide for you? Do not emulate the path, the rock nor the thorn. Cooperate *with* the Lord in your heart that you may become the good soil. Do not be surprised at blessings nor at trials, but in all things be faithful unto the Lord that you may become dead to the world but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

To whom, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, is due all glory, honour and worship to the ages of ages. Amen.