11th October 2026 Fathers of Seventh Council
Fr Chrysostom MacDonnell Luke 4

1] What did they expect those people, Our Lord's fellow Jews, living in Roman Judaea; what were they looking for? In the book of Deuteronomy there is a prophetic verse, set in the mouth of Moses, that reads: *'The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear.'* [Deut 18:15] From there began their hopes for the coming of the Messiah, one in the line of David; the anointed one, the Christ.

2] Ever since the end of the reign of Solomon the Wise, the old kingdom was quickly divided into Judah and Israel. Then they fell victim to conquest: first the Assyrians, then the Babylonians. Next came the Persians, then the Greek successors of Alexander the Great. Finally, the Romans took control in 63BC, dividing the land among client kings, like the irascible Herod, who was reigning at the time when the Messiah was finally born, unknown, among them.

3] Those people longed for their redemption once again, just as God had redeemed their ancestors in Egypt; just as, later on, God had liberated them from exile in Babylon. Such was the longing of the people in Our Lord's own day: a messiah who would bring on the cataclysm, bringing forth an army of angels and men, to cast out the Romans and expunge sinners from the

midst of Israel; exalting the chosen people and establishing, among them, the reign of God on earth.

4] But even the most fervent longings of mankind cannot affect what is in the mind of God. As Paul tells the Romans, '*Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counsellor?'* [Rom 11:33-34, cf Is 40:13]

5] No wonder that most Jews rejected Christ when He came: He was not what they were expecting, or even wanted. He was instead, as the prophet says, *'despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.'* [Is 53:3]

6] This is how we can understand the parable of the Sower today. It is a parable that concerns the kingdom of God and the One who calls mankind into that kingdom. And the parable is a surprise for those who would construct, according to their own minds, their own version of the Messiah, and not according to the mind of the Lord. So let us uncover what it means.

7] '*A Sower went out to sow his seed…,'* the parable begins. Christ is, of course, making a comparison, as in any parable: He represents Himself, here, as a sower, broadcasting seeds from a bag and scattering them round about. St John Chrysostom makes the point, commenting in his homily on Matthew's version

of this story, that it is indeed Christ, in His incarnation, who *went out to sow*, here. '*For the sower makes no distinction in the land,'* He says*. 'But simply… casts his seed, so He Himself makes no distinction between rich and poor, wise and foolish, slothful or diligent, and brave or cowardly, but He addresses everyone.'* [Hom 44 on Matt.]

8] The 'seed,' of course, is the Word of the Kingdom, the gospel itself, yet the Word is also Christ Himself, the Logos, the Word with God, and who was God, and was in the beginning with God. (cf Jn1:1-2) No, the parable is saying: the kingdom is *not* going to come in cataclysm as a day of disaster for the faithless and sinful; not yet! Now is a time of grace when all may have an opportunity to receive the Word or reject it, according to what lies in the heart of each one.

9] '*He who has ears to hear, let him hear,'* He announces at the end. How many, though, of his contemporaries, His fellow-Jews at the time, would hear? Perhaps many at first, especially among those whom He healed. But they soon abandoned Him to His crucifixion, once they saw that the nature of His messiahship was not as they were expecting: as He told Pontius Pilate, *'My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here.'* [Jn18:36]

10] And, in turn, the apostle Peter continues the season of grace; he becomes a sower of the Word, a fisher of men. In the Acts of the Apostles we hear him preaching, *'Be saved from this perverse generation. Then those who gladly received his word were baptised; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them.'* [Acts 2:40-41]

11] And there we find ourselves, like those in that first church in Jerusalem who in the next verse, *'continued steadfastly in the apostles doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.'* [Acts 2:42] Here we are, growing the seed like wheat for the harvest, however and whenever it comes, according to the mind of God.

12] Like old Israel, we, the New Israel too, long for our vindication. Redeemed, having gone down into the mystery of Christ's death through baptism ~ just like those in the Acts of the Apostles ~ we also long for salvation, the resurrection life in the kingdom of God. Yet however and whenever it comes, it remains a mystery. *'Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him.'* [1Cor 2:9]

13] Perhaps those who have become illumined in Christ through the ascetic life can foresee that which is to come. Paul himself was caught up to the third heaven, hearing inexpressible words which may not be uttered (cf 2 Cor 12:3-4). But meanwhile, we have

images and icons, ideas and pictures, forms of imagination, describing a life beyond. Though the ascetic fathers teach us to put aside fantasy and images when we pray in silence, for they are, at best, but parables and not the verisimilitude, and so often, open to delusion.

14] But having ourselves received the Word, we must be guarded, walking circumspectly, *'redeeming the time because the days are evil.'* [Eph 5;16] It is all too possible for us to find our own heart wandering along another path, where, like in the parable, the holy things we have received are trodden under foot, stolen by demons. Or where the heart becomes stony ground and our faith withers away. Or we allow the thorns to grow: the cares and concerns of this life, choking the new life within us. Now wonder that at the Great Entrance, before offering up of the great anaphora, the choir sing, *'let us now lay aside all earthly cares, that we may receive the King of all.'*

15] In the end, our true battle is not against any of the lost souls in this world and their illusions. In the first place, our warfare is a spiritual warfare against our own temptations and sins.

16] There is 'something understood' in our Orthodox consciousness. We do not distinguish, as in the western tradition, between mortal and venial sins, between soul destroying sins and the petty faults that cling to us. All sin misses the mark; is a drifting away

from communion with God. Clearly, some are more serious than others and there are states we can fall into where we should withdraw from receiving the Holy Gifts, until we have been to confess, lest we desecrate the mystery and do even more harm to the soul.

17] Let us, therefore, press on along the right path, the narrow way of asceticism, the way of the cross. Let us truly be rooted here, clearing out the stones from the heart. Let us strive to dig up the thorns that clog the mind and instead, bring forth that spiritual fruit in repentance, in humility, in patience. '*He who has ears to hear, let him hear.'*