

Today Jesus asks us to look at the Word of God as if it were a seed. Everyone knows what a seed is. It carries the promise of life within it. Jesus invites us to compare what seeds are and what they do with what we are and what we do.

I like the image of a seed since like many folks here, I enjoy gardening. There's something deeply satisfying about putting a seed in the ground, waiting to see whether it will germinate and then, if it does, to care for it until it produces a beautiful flower or something good to eat.

Of course, it's a lot of work too. There's watering to be done, fertilizing and the endless task of getting rid of those weeds. But that's just part of what living's about, isn't it? What we have to do in the garden's not all that different from the way we have to care for ourselves physically and spiritually.

It's pretty easy for me standing up here to imagine myself looking out at you as if I were looking out at some kind of huge, wild garden in which God has planted so many different and wonderful seeds. So much good has come from our garden here at St. Pat. Not a whole lot of weeds; pretty good stuff grows here. So many good families, wise and capable people who have handled the best and the worst that life can hurl at us with grace and dignity.

Like the many, many people here who've helped our friends in Haiti who have no means of helping themselves. People like our young fellow parishioners that you might've read about in last week's *Canton Life*. Along with their families and friends, they energized our community to help raise thousands of dollars for *Pennies for Peace* and the HARC Walkathon.

It's not possible in a reasonable amount of time to acknowledge everyone here who's bearing good fruit like that. The amazing thing about this part of God's garden here at St.

Pat's is that everyone's taking care of their part of the garden as best they can, and even helping other folks with their gardens too.

Unlike the seeds you can buy over there at Ocean State, no one can tell with people like you and me what will eventually grow in God's garden from the seed of his word that gets planted in each of us at baptism. Everyone, as the first reading explains clearly, is quietly doing the work of God whether we happen to know the details about it or not. Our understanding of how we fit into the big picture is in many ways as far beyond us as it is to the zucchini in my garden that it's going to end up in a pot of soup some day.

Let me tell you a story about a real person and some real seeds. Fr. Larry Bloom tells the story<sup>1</sup> from back in the "sixties, when scientists were predicting massive worldwide famine, [t]hey said that the famine would hit countries like India worse [than us]. India's population had grown to 440 million and the experts agreed that its land could not feed so many people. They concluded that the only thing the world could do was to let India's surplus population starve.

There was, however, one man who saw things differently. His name was Norman Borlaug. He went to India not with a shipload of food but with a seed called "Sonora 64."

Now, you can't blame people for being a little skeptical. Here was an American agronomist in India with a wheat seed developed in Mexico. But Borlaug convinced the authorities to give it a try.

They planted some Sonora 64 wheat in the Punjab region.... The results were spectacular and pretty soon they were using it throughout the subcontinent. Later, they introduced a new variety of rice, called IR8, and it brought even better results: Formerly a hectare ... could produce about a ton of rice.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.homilies.com/frames\\_weekday\\_homilies/index.htm](http://www.homilies.com/frames_weekday_homilies/index.htm) (Fr. Bloom: Power of the Seed, July 13, 2008)

With IR8 seed, a hectare - without fertilizer - yielded five tons of rice and, under optimum conditions, ten tons.... These new seeds enabled India and other countries to avert famine. Today with over a billion people, India actually produces a food surplus.\*\*” No one, not even Norman Borlaug, could’ve imagined an outcome like that.

It’s like that in your life and mine, too. Every life is full of great yet hidden promise with unimaginable outcomes, to feed the world not with rice or wheat, but with the love that all people need to live life to the full. The growth that matters most in our gardens is the growth in our ability to love.

Of course, like the seeds in my garden or Norman Borlaug’s development fields, this growth takes time. There are weeds we’ll have to pull from time to time that interfere with it. Self-centered or sinful habits that need to be yanked out by the root. Good gardeners don’t deny the existence of the weeds that are growing right in front of their faces or leave stuff like that growing in their gardens.

God’s aware of this and the fact that we’re still around bespeaks his marvelous patience with us. He knows what he created, after all, and it’s really not all that different with us, too. No one wonders in the delivery room why their baby didn’t come with a job and the ability to speak three languages fluently. Babies need time and help from everyone around them to grow into men and women, learn the great law of love and bear the kind of fruit that returns the love that was showered upon them when they were growing.

And so they do. Like one of the young people said in that *Canton Life* article, “If I’m good at doing this when I’m 10, think what I can do when I’m 11.”<sup>2</sup> It doesn’t sound like

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<sup>2</sup> Miranda Fitzpatrick-fortier, quoted in *Canton Life*, July 2008, vol 8, issue 10, p.25

this young person's particularly worried about what kind of soil she is or how the seed of God's word is doing in her garden these days.

When I was little and had first heard this parable I didn't understand this and I used to worry about what kind of soil I was, and whether God could grow in me or not. The last thing I wanted to do was to disappoint God, but somehow the image of having been tossed somewhere made me feel that somehow something critically important was totally beyond my control.

How could anyone really know for sure what kind of soil they were in if they weren't in on the throwing part, anyway? As time went on I learned more about the parable of the seed, and I don't think that way now at all. I hope you don't either.

Biblical scholars like Fr. Dan Harrington tell us<sup>3</sup> that the parable was actually written the way it was to help explain the mystery of election to Matthew's largely Jewish Christian congregation, and why it was that some Jewish people at the time accepted Jesus and others didn't. There's danger in identifying ourselves or other people with the different kinds of soil in the parable.

In our time, it's perhaps best read differently, maybe even closer to the intention of his original words. Today Jesus invites us to compare what seeds are and what they do with what we are and what we do. I'd invite you to take a look within yourself today. How's the seed of love doing in your garden? Is it growing? Great! Got some weeds? Pull 'em out! Need some help? Come share in the Eucharist and get a hand from the person who planted that seed within you in the first place.

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<sup>3</sup> Daniel Harrington, S.J., *Sacra Pagina: The Gospel of Matthew*, Liturgical Press, (Collegeville, MN), 1991, pp.193-202