

Commentary on the Gospel for Wed, Jun 19th 2013

As a farm person, verses about sowing and reaping have always resonated with me. Sowing is a tangible act of faith. We plant our seeds without knowing whether our efforts will produce fruit. Threats abound, including natural ones like drought, flood, or hail that we cannot control. But we undertake the effort with confidence that good can come from it, even when we have no assurance that it will work out.

Nature can still be harsh. You will indeed reap sparingly if you sow sparingly, but sowing bountifully does not assure a bountiful harvest. Crop failure is a time of heartache for those who till the earth. In our temperate climate, a year's labor and income may be lost. Likewise, when a mother cow loses a calf or worse yet, dies in the process of giving birth, we livestock producers are also deeply hurt, as these losses entail a long period of investment and waiting.

Everyone experiences loss in this world – rich and poor alike. If we were wired to remember only these painful outcomes, we might avoid these risks altogether if we could. But fortunately, we are wired for optimism. We may shed a tear, but we try again. That is a grace for us to savor, persistence when the going is tough and knowing that tough times also pass. And it is a reminder that we are creatures living with limitations; we are not God.

Charitable giving also reflects faith in action, perhaps even moreso than sowing seeds in the earth. Such giving requires an investment of ourselves (even money is, after all, a product of our labor) in a way not designed to produce a return for us; there is no tangible crop to be reaped. But returns may still come. We learn in today's readings our Father in Heaven loves a cheerful giver, and that such efforts are delightful and pleasing to God. God is worthy of such efforts, as He is the source of all we have. But for an added benefit, it is nice to hear our Lord Himself teaches that God also rewards us generously for giving of ourselves, whether in alms, prayer, or other forms of sacrifice. Yes, we really are that shallow, aren't we? It seems we are wired for rewards, too; this does not surprise our Lord.

Of course, rewards do not always come in the form we might anticipate. As we read through today's Psalm, we may wonder whether the writer presents an ideal connectedness that is not born out in this world, where sometimes the just suffer and the unjust seem to prosper. We need faith to see that all that glitters is not gold. We also need faith to see the hollowness of the fickle praise of others, which drives some of us, too. Sometimes it takes some learning, too.

It helps to have models to follow, particularly when tough times come, to learn what true rewards look

like. I have been blessed to have two wonderful parents who modeled generosity for us, demonstrating that living with open hands and open hearts sure beats the other approach. Without thinking about it, they were also cultivating this trait in others, including their children.

Perhaps when we give generously, God secretly puts something more into our seed sack, which produces something more wonderful than we imagine. Thus, we are sowing blessings, too. And unlike our natural world, when we sometimes don't reap, God allows us to reap them always. Thank you, Lord. Thank you.

Edward Morse