

Commentary on the Gospel for Thu, Jul 7th 2016

Mathew's Gospel today describes the instruction which Jesus gave to the twelve apostles as they began their lives of ministry. He invited them to serve, heal and teach proclaiming God's word while living simply and being dependent on the hospitality of others. As I read this gospel, I felt drawn to pray about my own path as a professional Lay Minister in the Catholic Church. Like the Disciples, I too had a guide. My instruction began with my Irish grandmother.

My grandmother was a loving woman who was also an amazing cook and excellent gardener. She could grow everything from a stunning flower to a luscious tomato. When I was a child she would often teach me about seeds and say to me that God planted seeds in our lives and wanted those seeds to grow. She would gently explain that it was important for us to notice where God was encouraging us to grow and if we cared well and paid attention to those seeds, they would take root and flourish just like her beautiful gardens.

At the age of seventeen I traveled with my best friend to the heart of Kansas to attend an all-female, Catholic school, Marymount College. My friend had eleven siblings and I had seven. We left our parents and eighteen siblings behind to walk in new gardens tended by the Sisters of St. Joseph of Concordia, Kansas. The seeds sown by the sisters would beckon and challenge us toward adulthood.

Following graduation and marriage, my husband and I accepted positions as Catholic school teachers in a small Nebraska town. I taught first grade and he taught and coached in the high school. We loved it. I could not imagine doing anything else because I found so much joy in my work with children. God's seeds were flourishing. I imagined my grandmother's pride. I even found myself scattering seeds into the lives of the children I taught.

Eventually we left small town life and moved to Omaha to continue our teaching careers in Catholic schools. One day the pastor of the parish where I was teaching asked me if I would be interested in a position in parish ministry. Although I initially declined, his persistence won out. I left my work as a teacher and stepped into the world of professional Lay Ministry. Something new was growing in my life. And although I insisted to my pastor that I would only take the parish position for one year, I loved the work, pursued a graduate level degree and have remained in ministry for over thirty years. My grandmother's instruction had prepared the soil of my spirit for the Gardener's seeds.

All of us are called to be gardeners in our lives and relationships. As God's partners in this world, we too must be sowers. Paul Molinari SJ said it the best: You must not be concerned about the fruit of

what you do. You must be generous in throwing the seed with open hands, without becoming discouraged when the fertile soil seems scarce... God, on the other hand, would have us sow generously, extravagantly, even wastefully—wherever we may find ourselves. We can afford to, too, knowing full well that God is the keeper of the harvest. We are mere sowers. As such, we need concern ourselves solely with this: how wide is the arc of our throw, how open our hands.

Jesus sent his Apostles into their ministries by sowing seeds of simplicity and encouragement. The Church grew and flourished. May the gardens of our lives flourish and may we continue to grow as we open ourselves to God's lavish and generous love.

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