

Fr. Tim Ralston – Homily for July 10, 2011

“We are Called to be More”. This is the very profound, but often overlooked, message that a group of young people are trying to spread throughout the Archdiocese of Cincinnati. This group, made up of 10 youth and 5 adults, have been making a walking pilgrimage through the Archdiocese all this week. They began on Monday morning at Maria Stein and will conclude tomorrow (today) at St. Peter in Chains Cathedral in Cincinnati. Their ultimate purpose was to raise awareness about vocations, and reminding everyone that God has called all of us to be more, to be more than what this world expects of us or even what we expect of ourselves. We are called to be holy, called to be saints.

As part of their effort, the pilgrims are promoting listening for the word of God in one’s life and upon hearing it, to go and follow it. For that is exactly what these pilgrims are doing, striving to find and follow where the Word that God is speaking to them, is taking them. And I saw this put into practice in a very tangible way this week. For this group stopped here at St. Charles on Wednesday night and left to continue their journey Thursday morning. Upon their arrival, we had some food and beverages available for them, knowing how hungry and tired they would be.

Everything was ready and it was time to begin dinner. Except for one thing. Not all of the young pilgrims were there yet. They had all arrived at the church, but had not made their way to the Borromeo room to eat, which I found surprising. Because I know that if I had just finished walking several miles out in the heat, I would be very hungry and thirsty and would have rushed to get to the food, and then found a comfortable chair to sit and rest for awhile. These young people though, didn’t do this. Instead, upon entering the church, their first stop was to the Blessed Sacrament Chapel. They wanted to stop in, kneel down and pray in the quiet presence of our Eucharistic Lord before doing anything else. They stopped in to talk with, and listen to, Jesus.

These young people clearly understand the power and the importance of knowing God and allowing Him to speak to our hearts and our souls. They are striving to be the rich soil Jesus refers to in our Gospel today.

So, what about us? Are we striving to be that rich soil as well? Do we even know how to become rich soil? Well, Jesus tells us how. He says, “[T]he seed sown on rich soil is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields a hundred or sixty or thirtyfold.”

So, the first thing we need to do to become good, rich soil is to hear the word. To hear what God has told us and continues to tell us. And we can, and should, be doing this in various ways. The most obvious is probably by listening to the Scripture readings at Mass, make sure we are attentive as the readings are proclaimed, and not allowing our minds to wander with thoughts like, “I wonder what we’ll have for dinner (breakfast, lunch)” or “I hope these are short readings so I can get out of here quickly.” Other ways to hear the word of God are by reading the Bible ourselves at home, or with our families or prayer groups. Or by listening to Catholic programming on TV or the radio, attending a good talk or conference and a variety of other ways. So, step one is simply to allow ourselves to hear the word.

Step two is a little more difficult. That is understanding the word we hear. Hopefully, the homilies we here at Mass help us with this. I try my best anyway and trust that God will take care of the rest. But again, we have other ways to understand God’s word – whether it’s good spiritual reading, meditating on and praying about the word we hear and asking the Holy Spirit to guide these reflections. This is important because without this proper understanding of the word, we end up like the seed sown on the path, allowing the evil one to steal the word away almost immediately.

And after we have heard the word of God and have at least started to understand it, that leaves one last step. Allowing that word to bear fruit in our lives. In other words, putting into practice what God is telling us to do. This is probably the most difficult step in this process. For even after hearing and understanding the word, we let other things distract us, hold sway over us or put fear into our hearts, and we give up trying without bearing any fruit. These other things might include our desire for more money or possessions, a relationship we have with another person, or some form of suffering that comes our way.

So, the key is to stay focused on the One who sows the seed, the One who speaks His Word to us. In order to do this, though, we must know God, we must spend time with Him, talk with Him everyday and not be ashamed of our relationship with Him. This will then make us the rich soil that will bear great fruit and will yield a tremendous harvest, both in our own lives and in the lives of others. We will see the word transform us, give us strength, consolation and joy. The Word will continue to grow in our hearts and in our souls. And like the young people on pilgrimage this week, we will hear the Word continually calling out to us, that we are indeed called to be more, called to be holy, called to be saints.