

MATTHEW 13 EXEGESIS

In our SOL session today, we seek to explore the Cursillo understanding of the important subject of sponsorship. A particularly relevant and meaningful Scripture passage as regards evangelization, which we can apply to our understanding of sponsorship, is the parable of the sower in the 13th chapter of Matthew's gospel.

It is a little intimidating for me to interpret this parable more deeply for you. That's because this is the first parable where Jesus explains its meaning to the disciples, starting with Matt 13:18. I don't think I can do a better job of interpretation than Our Lord has done! But maybe I can expand upon his explanation a little.

Notice in this first line the phrase "A sower went out to sow." We know that nothing superfluous or extra is ever included in scripture. So, this seems redundant; of course a sower sows, right? What this means is that the person doing the sowing is an experienced sower, who knows what he is doing. The sower is not a rookie, there is nothing random about it. The places where the seed is sown are chosen by an experienced sower.

Throughout this parable, therefore, the greater part of the seed is lost, not because of the sower, but through the ground that received it. As sponsors, it is up to us to till that ground and make it receptive, depending on the circumstances of the soil.

Jesus refers to the seeds as the "word of the kingdom" in Matt 13:19. Keep that in mind as we go forward.

The first bit of seed is sown on the path. What path is this? This is the well-worn path of worldly business. It is a path for people on the move, getting from here to there in a hurry. It's quicker to move on to the

next place while taking the path than by struggling through the weeds. The folks on this path are efficient in the ways of the world.

The path is hardened by the footsteps of people who are focused on worldly cares. The seed just sits on top of the hard dirt of the path, making easy pickings for something to snatch them away.

The seed that falls on the path is eaten up by birds. It has no time to take root, and is quickly gone.

Jesus tells us that this seed is the word of the kingdom which is heard by people who do not understand it, and the evil one steals the word away. They are people who have not set their minds on the things of God. Whatever reverence they might have for God is shallow and rootless.

This is one type of person that we might be thinking of sponsoring for Cursillo. As a potential sponsor, how can we best prepare them for a weekend? By getting them to consider more the things of the Lord at work in their lives. Our friendship with these potential candidates must progress beyond worldly ideas. Our conversations together must go beyond “Can you believe those politicians?” or “How about them Vols?” or “What is Kim Kardashian wearing?” As you come to know them better, start talking about things like “What do you think happens when you die?” or “How can you bring faith into your family life?”

It would also help if we are able to help them to slow down on their frenetic pace along the path of life. Quiet times together, away from electronics and other distractions, can give them time to consider where they are on the path of life. With the Lord’s help, we can change the path into a fertile field.

The next bunch of seeds fall on rocky ground. Stones do not allow soil to penetrate, so that any soil on top of it is necessarily shallow soil.

Deep roots cannot develop. When a plant in that soil tries to grow, it is easily scorched by the burning sun.

Jesus tells us that this type of person hears the word and receives it quickly with joy. But since the word has no roots, tribulation or persecution cause the person to fall away from the faith.

They say that the longest, hardest journey in the world is the 18 inches from the mind to the heart. These people have not yet made the connection from an intellectual understanding of faith to a faith that they can embrace in times of struggle and difficulty. When those trials come, they receive no comfort from their faith, and, rather than growing in faith, they turn away and blame God.

As a sponsor of a potential candidate, we must help them to start to make that connection. We should be faithful friends for them in hard times. We should be comfortable enough to share with them our own struggles, and how Jesus was there to help us through those difficulties. An honest sharing of our experiences with strife, improved by our reliance on Jesus in those times, will make an impression on our candidate, kindling in them a desire to have what we have. For while it might not be possible to for a rock to bear fruit, our apostolic work with the candidate might change the rock into fertile soil.

The seed that falls among the thorns actually grows to maturity. It grows, but it does not reach full maturity, it does not bear fruit. The thorns, the plants nearby, choke it off.

Our Lord tells us that the thorns represent “worldly anxiety and the lure of riches.” And these anxieties and temptations come from those that are growing right alongside of us.

Our desire for wealth does not permit us to do good works, so our almsgiving suffers. We fear to lose what we have, and we seek to

obtain what we do not have, and thus our thoughts are not focused on the great bounty that the Lord has given to us. As a sponsor, we can provide the potential candidate with a godly perspective on wealth and its use.

It is also possible that your sponsee is greatly influenced by his peers, who are far from God in their pursuit of material things. Here we see the wisdom of the Cursillo movement when it recommends that you invite them to your group reunion and to ultreyas, so that they might meet other committed Christians who are living a life of generosity. For in the case of the soul, with these methods the thorns just might be destroyed, and the seed can grow in full security.

Finally, it is our hope and prayer that God's word will fall upon a rich soil in the heart of the potential candidate. Jesus tells us that this will happen when a person, quote, "hears the word and understands it." They abstain from worldly goods, and they do good to the best of their ability.

The sponsee needs to hear the word of the kingdom from us. They need to hear it through study that we share with them, teachings of God and the Church that we talk about with them. They will begin to have an understanding of the love that God has for them.

But most importantly, they must hear it from the life that we live. Our apostolic action, towards our environments as well as toward them, will have the attraction of holiness that they will want to obtain for themselves.

I don't need to remind you about how important it is to get good candidates for a Cursillo weekend. We never seem to have enough of them! The parable of Matthew 13 can be an excellent scripture passage for us to meditate upon. As part of our study, this parable is

rich in instruction about how we might develop potential weekend candidates. Let us reflect on his holy word. May that word, through the power of the Holy Spirit, transform our minds and hearts, to make us the best sponsors that we can be.

God bless you.