

A sower went out to sow – the voice of God

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Brian Gleeson, a Passionist priest and Doctor of Theology, explores the parable of the sower.

The Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13;1-9), more accurately the Parable of the Soil, contains a complaint, a serious complaint. It's aimed at us, at you and me. Jesus is telling us that God's word is often less fruitful, less productive in our lives than it ought to be. It gets trampled underfoot, it dries up, it gets choked, or it does not grow. It deserves to make more difference to us than it does. Too often we fail to see the traces and signs of his presence which God puts into our lives. We do not see, hear, feel, touch or recognise them. Because they pass us by, they cannot therefore change us, change us into better people.

It's deeply disappointing to the heart of God when we fail to recognise the traces of his presence and the traces of his messages. It's far more disappointing than when we either ignore our fellow human beings or fail to notice them. A young man had a misunderstanding with his girlfriend – a very serious one. He tried to phone her, but when he heard her voice, he did not know what to say. So he hung up. He tried to write her a letter. But when he finished it, the letter sounded silly, and so he tore it up. Then he remembered that she liked roses, deep red roses. He bought her such a rose – only one, because roses were very expensive at that time of year. The woman in the flower-shop added some ferns to the rose and wrapped it for him in some crisp tissue paper.

The young man went to his girlfriend's flat. He put the rose down in front of her door. He then hid round a corner, and waited for her to come home. Right on time she arrived from work, looking as lovely as ever. His heart leaped in his throat, and his mouth suddenly went dry. He watched her as she opened her purse, took out her key and turned it in the lock, pushed the door open, stepped inside and closed it behind her. But she did not bend down to pick up his beautiful expensive rose. In fact, she did not seem to even notice it. What a disappointment! What a let-down! What a missed opportunity! What a heart-break! What a tragedy!

Every day of our lives God gives us signs, trying to get our attention. It might take the form of a flower, a thought, a feeling, a dream, a child, a news story, a chance meeting, a friend, a colleague, some pangs of pain or even of guilt. God has all sorts of wake-up calls. God may speak to us in

silence, in sunshine, in rain, on a beach, on a mountain, by a river. God may have something to say to us in a play or a movie, in a song or a piece of music. God may speak to us in the readings at Mass or in the homily about them. It's quite likely that God will speak to us especially in the richness of a loving relationship. As Jean Valjean sings in *Les Misérables*, "to love another person is to see the face of God".

The messages of God are so many and so different that the poet, Gerard Manley Hopkins makes the claim: "The world is charged with the grandeur of God". But how often do we notice? How often do we see, hear or feel God speaking to us? And if we do, how often do we stop and say back: "Hello, God! Thank you, God! What would you want me to do, God?"

Perhaps all too often we live like those who have eyes but do not see, like those who have ears but do not hear. Not only as far as God is concerned, but also as far as the people around us are concerned. We may be like the first man, not the second, in the famous quip: "Two men looked out from prison bars; one saw mud, the other saw stars" (Frederick Langbridge). As our response to the gospel message of Jesus, it would be worthwhile to ask ourselves a few matter-of-fact questions:

How strongly do we believe that God speaks to us through a series of signs – e.g. through other people? through things that happen to us? through things that are said to us? and through such marvels of nature as "the wonder and the glory of the everlasting stars" (Banjo Paterson)?

How convinced are we that all around us there are many traces of God's loving and caring presence, and that like an electric current flowing through it, "the world is charged with the grandeur of God"?

Do we fully believe that when we get together for the Eucharist, God speaks to us in quite special ways – in the people we meet and greet, in the readings, in the homily, in the consecrated bread and wine, in Holy Communion, and in the priest who leads our celebration?

Next, let us pray: Speak to us, Gracious God, and open our minds and hearts with your gentle love, so that the precious seed of your word may produce abundant fruit in our lives. We make our prayer through Jesus Christ, Your Word and Our Lord: Amen. ☩