Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time: 7/16/23—5:00 PM, 7:30 and 11:30 AM

Today’s Gospel is the very familiar one of the sower and the seed, and the hope is that you and I will always be rich soil, the ones who hear the word, understand it, and bear fruit yielding a harvest of a hundred or sixty or thirtyfold. In looking at this parable, the question that crosses my mind as I hear it is: how faithful are we to the task that has been given to us of sowing that same seed in other people? Jesus, the sower, has sown the seed of his word in us, but how well are we doing in planting that same seed in others? In other words, Jesus is asking us to be aware of the power of our example.

One of the best descriptions of the power of example is a poem written some forty years ago by a woman by the name of Mary Rita Sill and is titled **“When You Thought I Wasn’t Looking.”** She wrote is as tribute to her mother, but it is a good illustration of the power of our example in the lives of others. It goes like this:

**When you thought I wasn't looking, I saw you hang my first painting on the refrigerator, and I immediately wanted to paint another one.**

**When you thought I wasn't looking, I saw you feed a stray cat, and I learned that it was good to be kind to animals.**

**When you thought I wasn't looking, I saw you make my favorite cake, and I learned that the little things can be the special things in life.**

**When you thought I wasn't looking, I heard you say a prayer, and I knew that there is a God that I could always talk to, and I learned to trust him.**

**When you thought I wasn't looking, I saw you make a meal and take it to a friend who was sick, and I learned that we all have to help take care of each other.**

**When you thought I wasn't looking, I saw you take care of our house and everyone in it, and I learned we have to take care of what we are given.**

**When you thought I wasn't looking, I saw how you handled your responsibilities, even when you didn’t feel good, and I learned that I would have to be responsible when I grew up.**

**When you thought I wasn't looking, I saw tears come from your eyes, and I learned that sometimes things hurt, but that it’s alright to cry.**

**When you thought I wasn't looking, I saw that you cared, and I wanted to be everything I could be.**

**When you thought I wasn't looking, I learned most of life’s lessons that I need to know to be a good and productive person when I grew up.**

**When you thought I wasn't looking, I looked at you and wanted to say “Thanks for all the things I saw when you thought I wasn't looking.**

The power of example can also be seen in this wooden statue of the shepherd and the sheep. At one time, this statue was just a log, a piece of wood, but, little bit by little bit, in the hands of the sculptor, this image of the shepherd began to take shape. Such is the power of example. Through the example of others, in you and me, who were at one time ordinary blocks spiritual wood, the image of a shepherd began to take shape. So too are we called to shape that same image of Jesus the shepherd in the folks around us.

One of the best prayers about the power of our example to shape other comes from Cardinal John Henry Newman, a convert from Anglicanism to Catholicism in the late 1800s. It’s prayer that I understand that Mother Teresa of Calcutta’s sisters pray every day. It goes like this:

**Dear Jesus, help me to spread Your fragrance everywhere I go. Flood my soul with Your spirit and life. Penetrate and possess my whole being so utterly, That my life may only be a radiance of Yours. Shine through me, and be so in me That every soul I come in contact with May feel Your presence in my soul. Let them look up and see no longer me, but only Jesus! Stay with me and then I shall begin to shine as You shine, So to shine as to be a light to others; The light, O Jesus will be all from You; none of it will be mine; It will be you, shining on others through me. Let me thus praise You the way You love best, by shining on those around me. Let me preach You without preaching, not by words but by my example, by the catching force of the sympathetic influence of what I do, the evident fullness of the love my heart bears to You.**

Jesus, the sower, has indeed sown the seed of his word in us. With God’s help, may we be faithful to the commission he has given us of sowing same seed in those around us.