

- In his letter to the Romans, St. Paul speaks eloquently today of the hope we should bear for Heaven. Life here on earth is full of suffering, but as St. Paul tells us, our earthly sufferings “are as nothing compared with the glory to be revealed for us.”
- Our hope in Heaven must be firm, because God is a merciful God. He is a God who saves, whose greatest desire is that all of us be saved and enjoy the eternal joys of Heaven. For this reason our Lord gives us innumerable aids in life to help us along the path of salvation.
- In particular, our Lord has given us His one, holy, Catholic, and apostolic Church, which safeguards the Truth revealed in His Son, Jesus Christ, Who is the Word-Made-Flesh.
- For the whole of Her 2000-year history, Holy Mother Church has followed in the path of our Lord’s suffering and death. Just as our Lord was unjustly persecuted, suffered and crucified, so too has the Church been subjected to the evils and inhumanity of wicked men.
- From the time the Church was born in the Upper Room at Pentecost, men have persecuted Her and tried to destroy Her. In the process, countless saintly souls, who preferred to die rather than renounce our Faith or offend God, have allowed their blood to be spilled.
- Yet despite all this, the Church has never relaxed Her efforts of spreading the Gospel in imitation of Jesus, Who never ceases to communicate His grace and truth to us.
- The communication of our Lord’s grace and truth is the primary theme of our readings.
- The prophet Isaiah tells us that the Word of God comes down from Heaven like rain that waters the earth, making it fertile and fruitful. And His Word is powerful, capable of producing great wonders.
- For indeed, the Word of God that comes down from Heaven is no ordinary word like we speak to one another to communicate a message. The Word of God communicates God Himself – His grace and His truth – for the Word of God is the Word-Made-Flesh!
- In our Gospel today Jesus tells us the familiar parable of the sower and the seed, which gives us a powerful lesson about God’s Word. Namely, while our Lord is constantly sowing His Word among us, the effect that it has depends on the disposition of the recipient.
- Jesus explains this parable to His disciples: “The seed sown on the path is the one who hears the word of the kingdom without understanding it, and the evil one comes and steals away what was sown in his heart.”
- “The seed sown on rocky ground is the one who hears the word and receives it with joy. But he has no root and lasts only for a time. When some tribulation or persecution comes because of the word, he immediately falls away.”
- “The seed sown among thorns is the one who hears the word, but then worldly anxiety and the lure of riches choke the word and it bears no fruit.”
- “But the 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.”
- You see, Jesus comes to all of us freely, communicating His grace, yet never imposing Himself on anyone, all with the desire that His Word take root within our souls and bear the beautiful fruits of virtue and holiness.
- Our souls are like hidden gardens in which our Lord desires to plant Himself. But gardens must be tended. They require a great deal of effort in order to produce a harvest.

- The rocks and weeds of sin and vice must be dug out and removed, and the soil itself must undergo the painful process of being hoed and broken open so that it may be properly prepared to receive the Seed.
- This is why our Lord allows suffering in our lives. When endured with equanimity and patience, our sufferings help transform our souls into that rich soil capable of receiving the seed of God's Word so that it can germinate His grace and produce rich fruit.
- As we ponder this parable, it's obvious that we're to strive to be the rich soil through the patient endurance of our trials and sufferings so that when we hear the Word of God it may bear fruit within our souls.
- But there's more we have to do than just suffer and be open to God's Word. We must be open to God's grace as well.
- Most parishes are filled with people who have heard the Gospel and believe in it. But how many people truly cooperate with our Lord's graces to grow in holiness?
- The primary way God communicates grace to us is through the Sacraments. Our Lord fills our souls with sanctifying grace at our baptism, and this sanctifying grace is supplemented and strengthened with every sacrament we receive, as long as we remain in a state of grace.
- Yet, we must receive the Sacraments with faith, hope, and love for God. We must be reverent, prayerful, attentive, and truly contrite for our sins for His grace to penetrate us and sanctify us as we should.
- If you want the Eucharist to transform you, then give considerable thought to how you receive it! If you want your confessions to transform you, then give considerable thought to how you approach the sacrament.
- In addition to the Sacraments, God also communicates actual graces to us. Actual grace is the type of divine assistance that enables us to do good and virtuous things, and to follow God's law. Without receiving this grace first, we cannot do anything good.
- So whatever good you do, whether it be a corporal or spiritual work of mercy, your ability to do it comes through God bestowing actual grace upon you. Or if you pray to God for help with something very difficult but necessary to do, the help that God gives you is actual grace.
- It is a special divine aid given for particular occasions of need. Actual grace is also a healing grace. Actual grace heals the effects of original sin and our personal sin in our souls.
- But actual grace doesn't just make good works or difficult tasks possible; it doesn't just heal the effects of sin. Actual grace gives our actions a supernatural character and inspires us to love more deeply. It helps to train us for holiness in this life; that's the beauty of it.
- At every moment of every day our Lord is giving us all the graces we need to become holy.
- Yet if we wish to attain that holiness that will prepare us for Heaven, we must cooperate with God's graces by striving to root out all the sins in our life while also working diligently to acquire virtue so that we may more and more come to resemble our Lord.
- We must be diligent in our prayer and be as perfect as we can be in fulfilling the demands of our vocation in life. Moreover, we must continually stoke the fire of love for God we have in our souls, seeking to please Him and fulfill His will, even in the smallest details of life.
- This is how we prepare our souls, my brothers and sisters, so that they become that rich soil that bears fruit in abundance. This is how we cooperate with God's grace and prepare our souls for Heaven.
- Let us pray today that we may always have the zeal necessary to tend well the gardens of our souls so that they may indeed become that rich soil that bears fruit in abundance!