

A Christian Father  
Matthew 13:9-13

Deacon George Collins

The man in the Gospel who scatters seed on the ground is following God's plan. Although he does not know how the seed sprouts, he knows when to harvest. The harvest is stored for future use by the man and his family and friends. The harvest is enjoyed long after the work and labor have been forgotten. The man did not refuse to plant just because he couldn't understand or see the germination of the seed. He planted on faith that there would be a harvest. It is the same way with us. We cannot answer all the questions and problems of our lives; but we live and work in faith waiting for the harvest and the coming of the Kingdom.

The weeds and the thistles still come, but through the "good news" and faith in Jesus we rise above them. The gospel blueprints who we are: people of God who witness to the harvest and witness to the kingdom by performing corporal and spiritual works of mercy. The fruit of the harvest we sew in Jesus' name. We might well ask, "Am I the farmer who scatters the words of God in all the open fields that I find? Am I the person who not only sews, but fertilizes, cultivates, waters and protects the crop?" All this work is done out of faith that there will be a harvest.

Christian fathers have the same job description as the man in the gospel. Our Baptism compels us to do what the farmer did; to sew the seeds of faith by witnessing, proclaiming, virtuous living, love and forgiveness. All done in trust, to advance God's reign of justice and peace. Our words, our deeds, our actions, our interest in others are the seeds we plant, producing a harvest we may never see but others will. A harvest known to God alone.

A Christian father must be a witness, and as a witness he becomes a teacher of faith. He maintains a certain 'fit' between what he says and what he does. He is to become a martyr to the faith, not

necessarily to die for it, but certainly to LIVE for it. It takes courage to live one's faith. A Christian father must be a missionary, for that is what a Christian is. One who seeks daily conversion; one who walks with others showing them the path to God and encouraging them to follow. One who sets the tone of virtuous living. The seeds we plant today may not come to harvest in our life time or even in the next generation.

When it comes to planting seeds I think of my own grandfather who was bed-ridden for over twenty five years with crippling arthritis. It turned into a family tradition that every Sunday we went there for dinner so my mother could give Grandma some relief. As a twelve-year-old, I dreaded this weekly commitment because Grandpa would have me sit for hours and read the New York Times. He incessantly stressed the need to know history. At twelve I had little interest in history; I preferred to be out playing with my friends. The seeds he planted in me way back then, took years to germinate. Grandpa is long past but his influence on me and my brothers is still bringing forth fruit and is very much alive.

One incident is very vivid in my mind. Not too long before Grandpa passed away, he said something I didn't understand then, but I do now. He said that he was in a great deal of pain, but he offered it up on behalf of his grandchildren that they may never have to suffer. He did not complain "why me?", as much as we do not live for ourselves alone. We live for others and suffer for others. When we say "why me?", this is our rebellion against God and His eternal plan. Each of us has a part to play in His eternal plan and we can never be totally fulfilled in our finite experiences. We can be fulfilled only in His eternal Kingdom. My brothers and cousins have never suffered. We feel it resulted from Grandpa's heroic witness to his faith. Suffering brought out his best!

I think of my own father; there were so many good things about him. His love of God, his loyalty to family, his gift of forgiveness, were all special gifts from God. One day when I was about fifteen years old, he said to me, "I want to show you something

special." From his pocket he took out a key and showed it to me. I said, "What's so special about a key?" He said it was not only special but a magical key. I asked what was so magical about a key? He said, "No matter where I am, as long as I have this key I know I have a home and a family that loves me." There can be nothing more magical than that. So many years later I have come to appreciate that thought and try to emulate it. The seeds that were sewn in my life so many years ago have resurfaced and come to harvest over and over again, even when the sewers have passed on to new life. Christian fathers and grandfathers should be given special honor, not because they are biological, but because they are spiritual teachers as well. Christian fathers who lead their family to God are truly joyous people who can take out a key and see in it a loving home and a loving family both here on earth and in God's Kingdom.

JOY