

INSPIRED WORD March 2, 2016

Tonight is our third week of “Growing Seeds of Holiness”, and we are going to be talking about fertilization. The first week we heard the talk on “Preparing the Soil”, and last week we heard about “Water and ‘Son’ Light. This will be an exciting night because God is here! Cece and Sarah will be our speakers tonight, and they will talk about fertilizer.

TEACHING / SCRIPTURE

Tonight’s talk will be on “**Fertilizer**”. How many people have seen the movie, “The Martian”? The basic story is that there is a group of astronauts who land on Mars and they set up a small colony. A big storm moves over them, and they think that the person, (played by Matt Damon) is dead, so the remaining group then leaves. When the character, played by Matt Damon, comes to, he realizes that he is stuck on Mars for up to four years before the next launch would arrive on Mars. So he has a choice to make – he can despair, or he can plan on how to live on Mars. He decided that he is going to try to grow potatoes. First he gets the dirt that is needed, and he makes a garden area, and then he prepares the dirt. This is part of the talk tonight – that dirt alone is not good enough, so he has to make fertilizer, which is a very stinky process. He puts a little fertilizer in the dirt and mixes it up, then he plants the potato and covers it up and waters it. He waits patiently and finally the potato starts to grow. I won’t tell you the rest of the movie, so you will have to watch it on your own. What this is really about is listening to God’s voice. I think the number one concept here is that when we go to pray, or when we start down a spiritual journey because we have encountered God’s love, it is believing that we can also have God’s guidance. He is not just a one-time experience; He is an ongoing Presence Who wants to grow and guide His people into greater holiness. God **does** have a plan for your life, but it may not always seem like it. There was a song playing on the radio this morning and some of the words in the song were: ‘When it is all falling apart, it is actually falling together, so just hold on’. This scripture is from **Isaiah 30: 20 – 21**: “The Lord will give you the bread you need and the water for which you thirst. No longer will your Teacher hide Himself, but with your own eyes you shall see your Teacher. But from behind, a voice shall sound in your ears: ‘This is the way; walk in it,’ when you would turn to the right or to the left.” Sometimes it is hard to hear God’s voice and to realize that promise of ‘hold on to it.’ So the Lord fertilizes that growth with some **tools**. The **first tool** is **Sacred Scripture**; the **second tool** is the **teachings of the Church**, and a **third tool** is the **counsel of mature Christians in the lives of the saints**. The **fourth tool** is the **promptings and inspirations of the Holy Spirit**.

I (Cece) will talk about the first two tools and Sarah will talk about the last two tools. There are many, many ways in which God can talk to you, guide you and help you to grow. This is just a sampling of those who have made a difference in my life. When I was in college I was blest to be able to study Theology which is the study of God. The teacher was a tough teacher and had the reputation of being a tough teacher. He took us through a book called, “The Joy of Discovery” and we mainly focused on the Old Testament. It transformed how I read scripture. He would have us look at the sentence structure, the word choices – why did God say this word, rather than that word? What was the context? What was the history? What came before this passage in scripture; what came after this

passage? He kept going around in circles and drilling deeper and deeper. Then when you got to the end of it all, you tossed it all to the side, and you just prayed – “God, what are You telling me? What am I suppose to be hearing here? What one word or one phrase is popping off the page at me?” With all of that context, the work that I had done to get into it, and the Holy Spirit working on the other end to just help me to listen and hear, all of a sudden it worked for me! That wasn’t just stuff for other people, it was for me, and I was responsible for doing something with it. You have to do something with it! Plant it deep within your heart and let it grow and put down roots. Sometimes you will hear a scripture at Mass, or you will hear a scripture here, and maybe it doesn’t mean so much to you that day. But the next day you hear that same scripture again in a perfect context because you were listening the day before, you heard it and then it all comes together. We believe, as a Church, that scripture teaches faithfully and without error, the truth which God wanted to put into writing for all of salvation. This scripture is in **2 Timothy 3: 16 – 17**: “All scripture is inspired by God, and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.” The best part is that you don’t have to be a scripture scholar for it to work! You don’t have to be a Theology major to learn how to read the Bible. So if you are interested in that, there are a lot of Catholic Bible Study groups available in the diocese and in this parish. Or, you can be like Mother Teresa who would open her Bible, read just one sentence and ponder it for the rest of the day. The Lord would speak to her heart. The second way that God fertilizes our walk with Him is through the **teachings of the Church**. The way this impacted my life is that I had Dr. Scott Hahn as a teacher which was a great blessing, and again, it was really hard. He was an evangelist; a Presbyterian minister who converted to Catholicism. His great gift has been bringing people into the Catholic Church. But in school, he gave us an assignment; he told us to pick one teaching of the Church that we totally disagreed with and then write a 30-page paper on it, defending our disagreement. “Make it hard and make it real”, he said. I didn’t finish the paper in time for the class to end, so I asked if he would give me an extension of time to finish my paper because I was really into it. He gave me another two months to finish my paper. I wrote about celibacy, which was a teaching of the Church that I had trouble accepting – Why can’t priests be married? Scott Hahn gave me a couple of hints to get me started in how to understand that and he gave me a long list of readings. Months later, by the time my paper was finished, the beauty of that teaching was so deep in me that I couldn’t imagine it any other way. I get it!! But you sometimes have to go deep; dig in, because the teachings of the Church can be like a tapestry – you are looking at the outside and seeing this picture and then you flip it over. Have you ever seen the back of a tapestry or a cross-stitched cloth which has many knots and strings hanging all over the back of it? Every teaching of the Church is like those strings; you can start at one knot and then follow it and that ties into something else which takes you off in another direction. It is all so interwoven and when you flip it back over to the front, the picture makes such good sense. But sometimes you have to do the work to follow it backwards. In the case of celibacy, it was about freedom, freedom to serve. Everyone has a vocation and each are called to serve – it may be to be single; it may be to be married; or, it may be to be one hundred percent fully devoted to a life of the Lord. Some people say there shouldn’t be celibacy because it causes loneliness. Celibacy is not about loneliness, or having no loneliness; it builds community and it takes one deep in the Lord. So this is just an example. We can trust in the teachings of the Church – it is not treading new ground; it is an art of discovery.

The teachings of the Church can give us freedom to live fully; it is protection, it is love, and it is wisdom.

So now Sarah will give her talk about the **counsel of mature Christians** which is the third tool. Sarah speaking: How many of you have played sports when you were growing up? I only played basketball in the eighth grade, but I thought that it would be a good example to use in my talk. When you play sports, you always have a coach. The coach teaches you so much about the game, about the rules, all of the important techniques, and everything you should know about the sport. The same applies to the Church and your faith. So my talk is going to be about the counsel of mature Christians and the examples of the saints. Would anyone like to share their definition of discipleship? Are you all disciples? You **are all** disciples of Jesus! Jesus had disciples as well, and those disciples ministered to other people. So in this process they are 'disciplining' disciples really. As an example, let's say that Barb, over here, takes a couple of people under her wings and teaches them everything she knows about her faith. They learn about Christ and get excited about their faith, so then they go forward and share their faith with two other people – this keeps going on and on. God speaks to us through the works of others. Even in my own life, people have taken me under their wings and shared their faith with me. My standing here in front of all of you is a huge step for me. We can also learn from the examples of the saints. They are some of the best coaches we have, and I highly recommend that you read about the lives of the saints. They provide us some amazing stories about their lives. From other people I have learned to discern the promptings and the inspirations of the Holy Spirit. He does speak to us in our own lives and He does speak to us here in this assembly. I think it is very important to remember that! I didn't understand much about the Holy Spirit when I was growing up; I just thought that Jesus is my best Friend and that is cool. I didn't really encounter the Holy Spirit until my senior year in high school. I had gone through a really rough time during the first semester of high school. But after that I decided to start coming here to the Wednesday night praise and worship gatherings; that was because my mom had attended a Life in the Spirit Seminar and I saw some changes in her. I decided that whatever she had, I wanted that for myself. The Life in the Spirit Seminar changed my life! It was scary at first because I didn't understand everything, but through just stepping out in faith and listening, the Holy Spirit really started to speak to me. I have grown, over the years, to understand how the Holy Spirit speaks to me. He can speak through scripture, and one scripture verse that is really personal to me is **Jeremiah 29:11**: "For I know the plans I have for you," says the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to bring you despair, plans to give you hope and a future." The Holy Spirit speaks in many ways, sometimes it will be a certain sense of the right action; in listening and following this sense, it will give you a deep peace that it is the right thing to do. Sometimes you can hear His voice speaking very clearly to you, and other times you will sense a gentle urging to do something different. I can't stress enough the importance of just listening and waiting on God. Sometimes it is really hard to understand that it really is the Holy Spirit speaking to you and not just your own voice. It takes time to learn to discern, so it is important to look for confirmations. At times, as a young person, I just want to know **now** what God wants me to do in my life, but He doesn't always work that way. Sometimes He just wants you to **wait!** Discernment is really important to recognize God's will; it requires us to recognize the Master's voice in what ever way He speaks to us. It takes practice, commitment to daily prayer, reading of the scriptures, being a part of the community and the true desire to

follow Christ. But we can't forget that our journeys are all different from one another; we are all different and unique, and yet we are all called to follow God and His Son.

Cece speaking: In closing our talks, fertilizer in the natural world concentrates nutrients and helps life to grow deeper roots, stronger branches and brighter flowers. Spiritual fertilizer concentrates God's love and feeds us the nutrients we each need to grow in love, to grow in a deeper love of God, to experience God's love, and to be able to give it out to others. And that journey is called holiness and the process can be messy and a little stinky sometimes, as we deal with the things that we don't like to deal with in our lives. But it is always rich and it always makes the journey better, so don't be afraid of finding community, community of saints of the past and of the present, and the Word of God which grows so deep into our hearts.

EXHORTATION

Basic nourishment and sustenance is necessary for growth, but the avid gardener will also encourage the plants with fertilizer. For growing seeds, water and sunlight may be essential, but there are plenty of other growth enhancers from which the gardener can choose. These fertilizers even come specifically formulated for the individual plants, soil, and weather conditions. For us, our fertilizer comes from the teachings of the Church, from the lives of the saints past and present, from counsel, and from the promptings of the Holy Spirit. The richness of our Church history, traditions, and the lives of saints past and present encourages, strengthens and guides us. The Holy Spirit urges us on to new levels of growth. Have you been offering your journey in holiness, a variety of supplements to respond to all of your different growth needs?

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 16: 7 – 11: I bless the Lord Who counsels me; even at night my heart exhorts me. I keep the Lord always before me; with Him at my right hand, I shall never be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad, my soul rejoices; my body also dwells secure, for You will not abandon my soul to Sheol, nor let Your faithful servant see the pit. You will show me the path to life, abounding joy in Your Presence, the delights at Your right hand forever.

PRAYER

Here in this place now, we give glory to You! Jesus, it is all about You, our Savior, our King, Mighty Lord, and the Shepherd of our souls! It is all about You, Jesus! Thank You for Your holy Presence here tonight, thank You for Your touch; You open our hearts.

SCRIPTURE / PROPHECY

When we were praying in the back before this praise meeting started tonight, a scripture from **Joel** came to mind. It is **Joel 2: 12:** "Yet even now," says the Lord, "return to Me with your whole heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; rend your hearts and not your garments." Return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy, and repents of evil. After hearing the scripture, which had surprised us, the word that came was: "Do not worry about where you are, do not worry about where you are going, believe in Me and trust in Me; for if you worry and are concerned, that pulls your focus away from Me. **Focus, instead, on Me!**"

(Praying for people who are in need of prayers.)

