

Darleen Pryds  
Sunday, July 13, 2008  
Newman Hall/Holy Spirit Parish

Is. 55:10-11  
Ro. 8:18-23  
Mtt. 13:1-23 (13:1-9)

### **How did You Get Here?**

**The school where I teach has a wild garden surrounding the building. Parts of the garden are neatly groomed, but my favorite part is the section where the nasturtium grows. Right in front of the classroom window is an expansive patch of wild nasturtium vines that bloom into fiery orange blossoms every June. The gardener tries to tidy up the patch every now and then, and one day, he gave me some of the vines he had trimmed away, since he knew how much I loved the flowers. He offered them to me so that I might grow them at my home. And he assured me they are hearty plants; they'll grow anywhere. So I planted them in my front yard to brighten up what is a pretty scraggily garden. And within a week, the vines were dead. Not a single vine had been able to take root, despite my watering them and yes, even talking to them...I felt discouraged and thought that I should stick to even heartier plants like ivy.**

**Then a few weeks later, I noticed that on the porch, in a pot of soil I had put aside after another plant had failed, peeking up were the small, distinct leaves of a nasturtium. In gardening parlance, it's called a "volunteer" since I hadn't planted it. It seemed to appear all by itself. But a seed found its way into that pot of soil somehow and started to grow. I just didn't know how. That plant remains very**

small—nothing like the masses of vines at my school—but it bloomed last month, and after it appeared to die, has sprouted new, very small leaves.

**Every now and then I wonder: how did this plant get here?**

**The same can be asked of each of us here today: How is it that you are here?**

**Take a moment to consider this question....I don't mean, if you drove or walked; or who you came with or who you arranged to sit with.... No, I mean, how is it that you ever thought to come through the doors of Newman Hall/Holy Spirit church this evening or through the doors of any church on any given day....how is it that you ever walked through the doors of a church for the first time on your own?**

**Chances are you can remember that there was someone who first brought you to church...maybe your parents or a relative; maybe a neighbor or friend. If you ventured into church today or some other day completely by yourself—that is, if you're a volunteer like the nasturtium on my porch--chances are there was someone or something at some time that inspired you to do so.**

**This is one of the themes our Gospel today encourages us to explore: people who plant that first seed of faith within us and among us.**

**Our Gospel today is one of Jesus' parables—often called the Parable of the Sower. Like all of the parables this is a story so packed, we could explore many different meanings. But I'd like to just focus on the role of the sower. The sower casts the seeds indiscriminately, throwing the seeds widely. The sower doesn't not presume to cast the seeds only on what he judges to be good and fertile soil. No, he tosses the seeds so that they fall in a variety of places. Although the story is referred**

to as the “Parable of the Sower,” the lead character actually never sows the seeds....he hasn’t plowed the soil ahead of time to prepare it, nor does he go back and work the seeds into the soil. He “merely” casts the seeds liberally without presuming to control their fate.

The meaning of the parable on one level is clear: the seeds of faith are intended to be spread far and wide, without presumption as to where faith will grow best—or grow at all.

But who exactly is the sower here?

Who has been the sower of the seeds of faith for your own faith? And for whom have you been the sower of faith?

I spoke with a friend a couple days ago to ask her about this. Katherine, who is a wife and mother of four, immediately thought of her own mother. Very quickly and simply she responded, “Who planted the seed of faith in me? Oh my mom, for sure. I was baptized when I was two weeks old. Mom made sure of that. She made sure we went to church.” But, then Katherine’s story evolved into an intricate one of family dynamics that revolved around faith as her mother married a non-Catholic man. As I listened to all the ins and outs of family machinations, I heard an important sub-text of her mother’s perseverance in faith despite some rejections she endured on account of her Catholic faith. Katherine had learned to go to church from her mother, but she had also learned about persevering in faith.

A student, who I will call Jared, shared with me how surprised he had been by his freshman roommate, who was the very first person he had ever known to go to church. Every Sunday morning while Jared tried to sleep off his hangover, his

roommate had quietly gotten up and dressed for mass. The roommate never made a big deal about it. He just got up and left. Finally, Jared asked him where he went so early every Sunday, never expecting the answer he got: “To mass...it’s no big deal,” and then tried to change the subject. But Jared kept asking questions, and eventually went to church with his roommate, although they came to this mass and not the 9:30 mass. Jared hasn’t become Catholic, but he said that he now understands why people would go to church and he understands why people believe. He never gave faith any thought before.

And my own faith story started back in the 1930s, long before I was born. It starts with a woman I’ve never met. All I really know is that her name was Mrs. Healey and that she lived on Holly Street, here in Berkeley, the same street that my mother grew up on.

As I grew up, my mother would tell brief snippets of stories about Mrs. Healey, especially when she loaded us kids into the station wagon to go to St. Paul’s Lutheran church. My mother had her hands full convincing four children to go to church. And three Sundays of each month, we often got our way and stayed home to watch cartoons or to play basketball. But on the first Sunday of the month, my mother’s attitude was different, “No, we cannot stay home today. Today is communion. We are going to take communion.”

So I grew up with a strong sense that communion and the Eucharist was at the center of my faith. My decision to become Catholic as an adult was rooted in this. After I returned to live in Berkeley, I mentioned in passing to my mother that I lectured at St. Joseph the Worker Church, and immediately she gushed, “Oh I

know that church...Mrs. Healey used to take me there every week.’ It seems that Mrs. Healey had seen that my mother, growing up in the 1930s was the only child of two atheist immigrants from Finland. She asked little Norma’s parents if she could take Norma to church, and so she did, each week. My mother liked listening to the music of the mass, thought all the kneeling was a tedious, and found the Eucharist compelling and mesmerizing.

Suddenly I understood why we always went to church on the first Sunday of the month at the Lutheran Church. I understood my own devotion to the Eucharist. And I understood why after so many years of searching and doubting, I found my faith within the Roman Catholic Church. It was because of Mrs. Healey. She had firmly impressed on my mother the importance of the Eucharist, who then taught it to me by making sure we went to church when communion was offered at the Lutheran Church. My mother never became Catholic, but surely Mrs. Healey planted a seed of faith in her, and all she did was invite a little girl to church. It is because of that small act of kindness, decades ago, that I choose to walk through the doors at Newman each week.

All three of these stories of faith have one thing in common: someone had planted the seed of faith, not so much through any great effort, but by being themselves.

So I ask us to take some time tonight or in the coming days to reflect on who planted seeds of faith in you; perhaps offer a prayer of thanksgiving for the gift of faith they helped plant; and then, just go about your life doing the things you always do. And perhaps you will also be casting seeds of faith around you.