

Homily by Deacon Jim Olshefski

15th Sunday in Ordinary Time - July 12, 2026

“They look but do not see and hear but do not listen or understand.” (Mt 13:13)

Those words of Jesus in today’s gospel describe me to a “T.” I’ve got perfect vision since my cataract surgery a few years ago and I have pretty good hearing, although I may get an argument from Mary on that point. For since early in our marriage, I’ve had a “listening problem:” Whatever I’m doing at the time, whether it be watching television, reading a book or just daydreaming, I put my all into it; to the point where I block out everything else, even someone trying to talk to me. Over the years, Mary has learned that when I’m in “the zone” that she needs to get my attention by calling me by name and making sure that I’m looking right at her. Then, and only then, am I actually listening to her.

Today’s parable of the Sower and the Seed is very familiar to us. It pictures for us the journey of our life with God and God’s constant working to reach our hearts and open them to his love, truth and freedom. While it’s one of the longest of Jesus’ parables, it requires one of the shortest explanations because, at the explicit request of his disciples, Jesus himself explains it very clearly:

- Lack of understanding, a weak foundation in the faith, worldly anxieties and the lure of riches all result in the seed—the Word of God, the good news of the Gospel—withering and dying within us.
- But seed sown on rich soil—in an individual who is properly prepared, listens to and understands the Word—will result in a bountiful harvest, the coming of his kingdom here on earth.

In these examples presented by Jesus, the seed is portrayed as the Word of God—the good news of the Gospel—and the efficacy of that seed is dependent upon our readiness to hear **and** listen, nurture, and produce fruit from the Word of God in our daily lives. And that requires faith. But true faith is not a passive reception of information; it requires a receptive, open, and cultivated heart that allows the Word of God to sink deep and transform our lives.

Growing in faith and serving as good soil isn’t always easy. In today’s letter to the Romans, Saint Paul reminds us that *“the sufferings of this present time are as nothing compared to the glory to be revealed for us.”* It requires sacrifice, patience, and enduring the “thorns” of everyday life. Yet, every trial is a part of our spiritual maturation process, preparing our hearts for the ultimate spiritual harvest.

“They...hear but do not listen or understand.” (Mt 13:13) Which takes me back to my opening point about my “listening problem.” Hearing is easy; listening is hard.

At times on our life’s journey, we find ourselves hearing his Word but we’re unable to really listen, we just don’t understand. Sometimes, we find ourselves on rocky ground, not yet ready to receive God’s Word while at other times, worldly distractions and anxieties choke-off our ability to listen to God.

But, more importantly and hopefully most often, we find ourselves on rich soil, when we’ve been gifted to hear, listen, understand and embrace God’s Word. Then we recognize that our lives can bear fruit, and through the gifts of the Holy Spirit our hearts are open to achieving the purpose for which God placed us on this earth, on his “sowing field.”

Then the promise that we heard in the first reading from Isaiah will be fulfilled: “My word shall not return to me void, but shall do my will, achieving the end for which I sent it.”