

SEXAGESIMA

February 16 2020

Old Test: Is. 59:10-13

Epistle: 2 Cor. 11:19-12:9

Gospel: Luke 8:4-15

Standing...

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Mysteries and secrets.

Are they the same or are they different?

“He who has ears to hear—let him hear.”

Let us pray. These are Your words Holy Father. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Sitting...

A mystery is something that at some point is revealed—it’s solved—made clear—brought into the light.

If it’s a Tom Clancy novel, for those who remember him, you’ve got to read about 1000 pages before anything is made clear.

But, this is why we like mysteries—because at some point, if we don’t give up reading or watching, we learn who done it, or what it means.

However, a secret—that’s different—because the truth is never known.

And the hope of getting the truth, usually dies with the person who carries the secret to their grave. Hence conspiracy theories.

Posit your theory all you want, but at the end of the day, we don’t know—nor will we ever.

I say this because there are various mysteries in the Bible, as well as secrets. Gratefully, there are more mysteries than secrets, but both are there.

For example, one secret in the Bible is what we heard in our Epistle lesson—of St. Paul being caught up into the third heaven.

You’ve got the first heaven called “sky”—where birds and clouds dwell.

The second heaven called “space”—where sun, moon and stars dwell.

And then there’s the third heaven,

where God dwells. That's where St. Paul went.
To which we say, "Spill the beans Paul—tell us about going there!"

But he says, "no."

Paul says he heard things there which cannot be told,
and he doesn't tell.

So, insert whatever theory you'd like.

But that's all you've got—a theory.

Because—it's a secret—Paul's lips are sealed.

However, when it comes to mysteries, that's different.

Mysteries of the Bible are revealed—they're made known.

And one mystery in the Bible is the use of parables.

Beloved, parables are not stories told to make things easier to understand.

Some very kind-hearted and sweet Sunday School teacher told you that one time,

and you've believed it ever since. But that's not what parables are.

Parables are riddles.

They are told to hide the truth—to make the truth unclear.

And we, just heard Jesus tell His very first one—
the first of 46.

Why did Jesus start speaking in parables?

Well, it's when the people rejected Him. The Bible tells us,

Jesus came unto His own and His own did not receive Him (see John 1:11).

So, when they wouldn't look upon Him as the promised Messiah—

looking to Him for entertainment purposes or to provide a free meal—

and when the religious leaders said He was in league with the Devil,

that was the last straw.

The truth, once very clear and straightforward was now—

on purpose—made confusing and difficult to grasp.

Jesus' teachings became mysterious.

Yet, to those who asked for the mystery to be made clear,

He did so. And thanks be to God,

because they asked, we have the interpretation.

The mystery has been made clear to us.

Otherwise, we'd be scratching our

heads coming up with our own

interpretations.

So, again, Jesus told this first parable to the masses.

Later on, His disciples wonder what He meant.

They ask Jesus to explain, and He does—but He says,
 “To you—the disciples, not the masses—to you
 it has been given to know the μυστήριον [moos-tay'-ree-
 on]

***the mystery, not the secret—the mystery of the kingdom
 of God.***

And then He takes what is unclear and makes it
 clear.

So, what does Jesus tell them?

He says that the seed in the parable is the word of God—which means
 it's

powerful, which is exactly what we heard in our OT lesson.

But too, the seed is always under attack,
 by the Devil, by the flesh and by the world

The seed, that being the Word of God is everything Jesus speaks,
 everything recorded in Holy Scripture,
 and everything preached by the ministers of Jesus
 (assuming what they preach are in line with His revealed Word).

The Word of God tells how the universe was created in six days,
 how Mankind sinned against God and brought sin and death into the
 world.

The Word of God tells how the nations all went their own way,
 but God preserved Israel, as rebellious as they were,
 until the coming of the Christ.

The Word of God tells how Jesus Christ is true God and true Man,
 how He obeyed God's Law in our place,
 how He allowed Himself to be rejected and crucified
 as the atoning sacrifice for our sins,
 how He rose from the dead and sends out His Spirit into the
 world

to gather a holy Church unto Himself,
 and to bring sinners to faith.

Teaching them how to live as saints in the world.

Going back to the parable,
 this Sower has been reaching into his bag of seed and throwing it
 in a wide arc since the days of Adam and Eve.

That's when He started sowing.

He's thrown this powerful seed over the spans of the millennia,
 over the course of the century, the decade,

over the week and yes, even over this very day—right now.
 The seed is just as powerful as it's ever been—
 and it's attacked just like it's always been.

And where does this seed land? On us.
 On these different types of soil.
 It falls into the ears and on to the hearts of sinners.
 And get this, we've all been one of the soils at one time or
 another.

Meaning, we've heard the Word before and rejected it outright.
 Don't fool yourself. We've all done it.
 We thought we were exercising our independence—our individuality—
 our intelligence over God's.
 But the truth is,
 it was nothing more than the Devil,
 who always looks for ways to gobble up the
 seed.
 The Devil does not want you to hear,
 much less believe.

At other times, we've heard the Word and received it with joy,
 nodding in agreement, appreciating it even.
 But as soon as some testing came our way,
 and sadly, it doesn't take much, we fell away.
 Be it trouble, suffering, pain, loss...
 I mean, it was no problem hearing God's Word
 when it was easy, but when it required sacrifice, or
 pain,
 we gave up, because there was no root.
 The Word and Sacrament by which the Holy
 Spirit would have deepened and strengthened
 our faith to sustain us in the heat of the day—
 we thought little of them and paid the price.

At other times, the Word landed in our ears and upon our heart
 and wouldn't you know it, the faithful reception of God's Word and
 prayer...
 it just got in the way of all the other things we want to do.
 The other things we needed to take care of,
 —fun things, people to see, money to make.
 We let the world and the pleasures therein
 have its way.
 And that little sprout of faith
 that started to grow...got choked
 out

by cares, riches
and pleasures of life.

All of us have responded like this to the Word.
Truth be told, it's some of you right now.
You who care more about what's on your smart phone,
or more about the to-do list running through your mind.
You care more about that than having ears to hear.

But, if you've been listening to this sermon,
and you're thinking about what you're hearing,
then God's Word has already found its way into your heart.
So, what will you do with what you've heard?

Beloved, your heart doesn't have to be as hard as a walking path;
the devil can't snatch the seed of God's Word away
if you gladly hear it and learn it.
Nor, does your faith have to be shallow.
God's Word is like a hammer that shatters the rock,
and preserves you in times of trouble and persecution.
Your faith doesn't have to be choked by the cares,
riches, and pleasures of life; God's Word is even now
warding off those things so that you don't get
distracted by them or caught up in them.

Jesus teaches the soil of your heart can be noble and good.
Where you keep God's Word, bearing fruit with patience.

On this Sexagesima Sunday Christ calls you to get serious about hearing
God's Word
and doing what it says, for He doesn't want to see His Word snatched
away,
or your faith withered or choked to death.
He wants to see the seed take root, for you to grow—for you to
flourish,
so that you not only remain in His kingdom, all the days of
your life,
but you're a blessing to everyone around you.

You know, another mystery in the Bible that's made clear is the Church—how
it is the kingdom of God on earth.

Other mysteries include holy baptism and the sacrament of the altar—all
made clear—all brought into the light for you—all given to you.

So that you might stay in the one, true faith forever.

May God grant it, Amen.

Standing...

And now may the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.