**17th SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**

Every farmer who owns the land is thinking about next year.  He is planning and preparing the grounds, knowing that after the snow is gone and the earth begins to warm, he will once again prepare the soil by planting and nurturing seeds, and laying down the fertilizer necessary to yield a beautiful and healthy crop.

We learn this morning dearest brothers and sisters in Christ, that our Lord is no different.  Our Lord is a serious farmer! He is serious about wanting to have fruit.  He always expects a good harvest from us…constantly reminding us through the Gospels of how to prepare the soil of our lives…how to cultivate the field of our own hearts so that the seeds which are continually given to us can take root and bear fruit.

So how have we done?  How have we prepared the soil of our lives?

While everyone hopes that they find themselves in the good soil, I think that the rocky soil is probably where a lot of us find ourselves from time to time.  Think back to a time where you were truly inspired by something in the Divine services, or about the last time you had a truly meaningful and tearful confession.  For a few days, everything seemed so wonderful.  Your prayer life increased, you read books or attended classes to develop your knowledge and relationship with God, and were constantly being filled with the grace of the sacraments.  But as the days went by and your life returned to “normal”, you fell back into your old habits and stopped allowing that Grace which you had received to truly transform who you are, and what your purpose was in this life.

I think we have all found ourselves to be “rocky” Orthodox Christians from time to time.  We tell ourselves that it is better to be just a little bit Christian…than to never have been Christian at all.  But in this parable we learn that being a little bit Christian ultimately does NOTHING for us.  In the end, the seed is withered up and destroyed, just as it was for those which fell on those who didn’t believe in God at all.  The Christians that allow the business of life, the stress from school or from our jobs, and more recently, an addition to sports or hobbies, to take precedents over our duty to live a life like Christ.

In our country especially, we see an increasing number of Christians who place their hobbies above their relationship with God.  I think sometimes people get upset with priests for giving them a hard time when someone says that they are going to miss service for a football game on Sunday morning.  Priest’s don’t say these things because “they don’t get it”.  They say these things because they love you…they care for you…and because they remember THIS PARABLE.

What will the thorns and weeds of this world choke out of us next?  They have already made it extremely difficult to develop a relationship with our Lord during the week…and now they want to take away the ONE DAY that we have tried to set aside for Him…the day we used to call “The Lord’s Day”?

Who amongst us will have the courage to say: “That’s enough?”

Three types of soil…all resulting in the same thing for the seeds.

Why is it, that we have such a difficult time cultivating our spiritual lives on the good soil?  But any farmer will tell you that in order to have a good crop, sometimes you have to put fertilizer on it.  And although that fertilizer stinks, it ultimately it bears the best fruit possible:  the life sustaining fruit, that will carry us far beyond the hobbies…far beyond our worldly attractions…and into the kingdom of God

Brothers and Sisters in Christ, I pray that all of us leave here today, and start to think about the thorns and weeds we have in our own lives that are preventing us from cultivating the good soil.  Our Lord **never** said that living a truly Christian life is easy…but He DID say that it was necessary…and that the fruits of our labors would serve us for all eternity.

May God continue to bless our efforts!