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Faith, hope, and love, or Charity, are the three cardinal virtues that every Christian must possess to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Last week we heard in the Parable of the vineyard of the virtue of faith. How we must have faith in Christ, faith to complete the work that He has called us to do, faith in His promises that regardless of the hour of the day in which begin to labor in His vineyard we will be rewarded and paid the wages of Everlasting Life. We see this kind of faith in the life of the Apostle Paul, who endured life threatening hardships because of his faith in Christ. These themes of faith continue in today's lessons, continued today is the testimony of St. Paul of his travels, hardships, and sufferings for Jesus Christ. We are reminded that our journey with Christ will not always be a pleasant one. We are encouraged by St. Paul to put our hope not in ourselves but in the Sower, in Jesus Christ, regardless of what we endure for His sake.

*The Sower went out to sow His seed.* We heard that while the Sower was broadcasting the seed all over, that some fell by the wayside and was eaten by the birds. Some fell on rocky land, some among the thorns, and finally some in good ground. It is an interesting parable, because anyone who knows anything about gardening knows that one cannot just go and plant seeds anywhere. A serious gardener or farmer would not plant wheat, corn, or hay in ground that has not been tilled and fertilized. Especially not in rocky soil or ground that is covered over by thorns or briars. This is why the gardener spends so much time weeding out flower beds, thorns, and briars. To sow seed in land that had not been prepared, that was rocky, thorny, or on the wayside, was absurd to any farmers or farmhands listening to this parable at Jesus' feet. In Bible days seeds were expensive, the seeds that were planted were a portion of the harvest that had been set aside to plant the following year.

But notice in this parable that the Sower is not criticized for having sown seed on good and bad land. Neither is the seed itself criticized, we do not hear that some seeds were good and others were bad. We know the seed is good, as Jesus Himself tells us the seed is the Word of God. Bp. Frank Weston writes, *in each seed was the spark of the new life of the Gospel.* Yet, what is criticized is the state of the land on which the seeds were sown. Why does the Sower spread seed on the wayside, on rocky, thorny, and on good land? In hope that the Gospel will take root and spring

up in hearts regardless of the soil being rocky, choked with thorns, or turned into birdseed. We see in this parable the great love of Jesus Christ, that regardless of the hardened and rocky hearts, and the hearts choked through with thorns, He still gives every person the opportunity to hear the Word of God, and to have that Word take root in their hearts.

We may still wonder though why Jesus bothers if He know the state of each person's heart. The answer is found in every flower that blooms in the cracks of the sidewalk, in every abandoned structure covered over by vines. Overtime, plants break up rocky ground and overtake the thorns and briars. All that is required is that the seeds of the Gospel continue to be sown in hope, that they continue to be cast far and wide. Today we catch a glimpse of the divine Hope of Jesus Christ. He teaches us this parable to explain how the Kingdom of Heaven works, a Kingdom which operates off of the principles of Faith, Hope, and Love. Our great King, Jesus Christ, Himself sows the seeds of the Gospel in good faith on souls good and bad, in hope that something will spring up, that overtime the soul will be better able to receive *the spark of the new life of the Gospel*. It shows His Love, that all kinds of hearts have the chance to receive a seed of the Gospel, and it is an act of love to spread such precious seeds over unworthy hearts.

Jesus calls us into this season to work in His vineyard by faith, He calls us to prepare the soil of our hearts to receive His Gospel. It is His great hope that we will do the work, that we will prepare ourselves. And what better opportunity to start than this coming Lent.