

I think that it is a universal phenomenon that at some time or another we will get angry at God. Since we know in our hearts that God is all powerful, we blame Him when something goes wrong in our lives. And yet, there is a paradox within God's power which is hinted at in today's readings. In our first reading from the Prophet Isaiah, we hear, "my word shall not return to me void, but shall do my will, achieving the end for which I sent it." The Gospel, however, seemingly contradicts this. There, Jesus tells us that the seed which God scatters sometimes does not bear the fruit for which it was sent.

So what gives? How can it be that God is all powerful while at the same time His Word does not bear the fruit for which He was sent? To understand this paradox better, we have to dig into the three reasons that Jesus gives us for why His seeds do not always bear fruit. The first reason that we are given is that the person hears the Truth without understanding it and then Satan comes to steal this Truth out of their heart. The second reason given is that someone hears the Truth and accepts it, but then falls away when some suffering comes their way. The third reason given is that someone hears the Truth, but they later become distracted by worldly desires.

In all three of these cases, the thing which blocks the Word of God from bearing fruit in a person's life is the person themselves. It is a stunning truth that God willingly limits his power by giving us free will, so much so that the only thing which can block the will of God in the entire world is a closed human heart. If we are not being honest with ourselves, we might want to dispute this. "It's not my fault that I am not bearing more fruit in my life. It's God's fault. I would be doing better if God didn't give me so many challenges... if God didn't give me so many weaknesses... if God would just give me a little more grace. I am trying as hard as I can, so if He wants me to do better, He needs to do something more with His power."

It is easy to try and place blame somewhere else, but the truth is that if God's grace is not working in our lives, the blame rests with ourselves and no one else. God's grace truly is all powerful and even the smallest amount of God's grace can accomplish miracles. As Jesus once said, "If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. [With faith] nothing will be impossible for you." We are completely surrounded and filled with God's grace, and if we accept even a tiny sliver of it, God can accomplish miracles in our lives. It is only our closed hearts, and nothing else, that can block God's grace from working in our lives.

So how do we open our hearts to God? To answer this question, we need to reflect more deeply on these three things that Jesus said can block His grace from working in our lives. The first thing that He mentioned was that we sometimes hear the Truth without understanding it and then Satan comes to steal this Truth out of our hearts. I have seen too much in my life to not believe that Satan is real and that he is actively working in the world to keep us from the Truth. And yet, Satan is not all powerful. While he can harass us and oppress us, he cannot steal the Truth away from us... he cannot keep us from bearing fruit in our lives unless we let him. We often let him, however, when we believe his lies. This happens every single time if we don't learn how to discern the Truth from his lies. And we can only do this if we have an ongoing, living relationship with the Truth Incarnate, Jesus Christ, a relationship nurtured through prayer and study.

The second thing which keeps us from opening our hearts to God is worldly distractions. I am especially bad about this. I sit down to pray, and I am immediately distracted by things of the world. I start thinking about the things that I need to do, about things that I want to buy, about all these things going on in my life, and I stop spending time with Jesus. Now, don't misunderstand me, we need to be bringing the

things that are going on in our lives to God in prayer. But there is a difference between bringing these things to God in prayer and spending our time in prayer worrying about the things of the world. These worldly desires distract us from God and turn us away from a relationship with Him... turn us away from relying on Him... and slowly bit by bit we begin closing our heart to God and instead begin opening our heart up to the things of the world and living for them instead of God.

The final thing which keeps us from opening our hearts to God is a fear of suffering. Often when suffering comes our way, we start getting angry at God because He is supposed to make us happy and we begin to doubt His love for us. While there is a lot to this discussion, one brief point worth mentioning is that we often confuse joy with pleasure. God has promised us joy and happiness, but as Christ showed us, this only comes through sacrifice. We, however, don't want to sacrifice and instead want joy on the cheap and settle for pleasure. This would be like a weight lifter who refuses to lift weights because they are too heavy. In the end, he will never grow in strength and never be who he is supposed to be. If we want to truly be happy, then we must learn to lift our cross like Christ so that we can be purified through our suffering and find true joy.

Yes, our God is all powerful and with that power He has given us every single grace that we need to become truly happy. But He has willingly limited His power and given us free will so that we can choose Him and His grace on our own. We have to choose to have a relationship with Him... we have to choose to live for Him alone... we have to choose to suffer and sacrifice so that we might be purified and bear fruit in our lives. While it is true that this isn't always easy, the simple fact of the matter is that it is possible. Our God loves us and He has given us every single grace that we need to be happy, and, in the end, if we don't choose the happiness that He offers us, then we have no one to blame but ourselves.