

Nurturing Seeds of Faith and Hope



Christopher News Notes

SPRINGTIME IS THE SEASON FOR PLANTING SEEDS IN THE GROUND so we can watch them turn into beautiful blooms in the weeks and months ahead. But any time of year is perfect for sowing seeds of faith and hope in hearts and souls. Like their real-life counterparts, these spiritual seeds need to be nurtured.

But instead of using water, the virtues of patience, humility, love, and kindness are what make the difference and allow us to become more Christlike in the way we live our lives.

Sowing Good Seeds is Life-Giving

In Matthew 13:3-9, Jesus shares a parable about a Sower scattering seeds. Some were eaten by birds, others fell on rocky ground or thorns where they were ultimately destroyed. But, Jesus continued, "Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. He who has ears, let him hear."

How can we ensure that the seeds we plant—or the seeds that are planted in us—find good soil so they can thrive?

Sister Ave Clark's life could easily have been derailed after she became the victim of abuse and assault. But a spiritually-minded psychiatrist named Dr. Frederic Gannon became the sower of good seeds for Sister Ave when she failed to come to terms with what happened to her.

Dr. Gannon explained, "You're wearing yourself out. When you learn that life isn't fair...you will learn to weave compassion around it."

That revelation changed Sister Ave. She realized that when bad things happened to her—or to anyone—feelings of anger could arise and become all-consuming. But accepting that life wasn't always fair allowed Sister Ave to explore how she could use her suffering to help others find new life after getting hurt.

During a *Christopher Closeup* interview about her book *Sewing--Sowing Good Deeds with Joy and Hope*, she explained that approach can help others see their trauma "not in a negative way, but maybe it also has a grace in it. So, there's a balance to it. I'm not naive. Some things are a great struggle to get through...[But] we have to get up, and we have to look at life in more positive, life-giving ways."

Dr. Gannon's insight planted the seed for Sister Ave to create Heart to Heart Ministry, in which she counsels people who have endured various types of traumas. "What do we put into our soil of life," she reflected, "so not only that it blooms for us, but it also blooms for other people, like with charity, hope, forgiveness, and understanding?"

As an example, Sister Ave recalled speaking at a Compassionate Friends meeting, which brings together people who have endured the tragedy of losing a child: "As I looked out at them, I realized that these people, they're helping each other, they're carrying each other. And there's joy there, too; the joy of befriending someone in their sorrow. [It's] not saying, 'Don't worry, it'll go away in time.' No. There are many sorrows we'll carry with us for the rest of life. But how do we learn to carry them?...When we sow love, in whatever way we're doing it, we bring peace."

'The Widow's Mite' Sows Good Seeds

You don't need power, money, or wealth to sow good seeds in someone's life. All that is required is love, empathy, and compassion.

For instance, author and speaker Lisa Hendeley traveled to Colombia several years ago to observe the work of Catholic Relief Services (CRS). Lisa and the team of journalists she was with met a young woman named Maria, who had benefited from CRS' annual Lenten appeal, Operation Rice Bowl, which provided her with a scholarship for job training so she could contribute financially to her family.

During a *Christopher Closeup* interview about her book *Jesus Every Day, Jesus Every Way*, Lisa explained, "[Maria] and her family welcomed our traveling group of journalists and one priest, Father Rafael Capo...into their home for a beautiful breakfast one morning. That year, [Maria's] picture was actually on the Rice Bowl box, so her story was being told, and we brought those materials."

Lisa noted that Maria's family's home was made mostly of tarps, but due to her job, they would soon be able to build a brick wall. This was a point of pride for Maria, who expressed genuine thanks for the help she received.

"After the meal," Lisa continued, "Maria came up to Father Rafael with the Rice Bowl box. On the side of it, she had written their family's names. And inside of it were just a few simple coins. She

The Seed of Joy

"There is a seed that is not made of matter.

It isn't material;

In essence, it is ethereal;

It is the seed of joy.

When it is grown in the fertile grounds of gratitude,

Blessed by the water of empathy and kindness,

Nurtured by the sunlight of compassion,

It will flourish and fashion a fruit that will nourish the soul,

Quench the thirst and satisfy the hunger for connection.

It will make you feel whole and set you free

To be and become what you are meant to be,

Allow you to cope,

Help you to heal, hope,

Search for truth, seek beauty.

And then you can go on to grace the garden of humanity

With seeds of your own joy."

—James Palmaro, poet

gave it to [Father Rafael] and said, 'Padre, we can't give much, but we know what this has done for our family, and we want to help other families around the world just like ours. So please accept this gift. It's not very much money, but it's from the heart.'"

"Father Rafael...is a very big, burly, weightlifting priest," Lisa continued. "He was moved to tears that day, and I was, too...[Father Rafael said], 'I'll never preach again on the parable of the widow's mite without thinking of this moment, where someone is giving not from their excess, but from what they need in their day-to-day life—and doing it with such love and such compassion for

other people.' You don't see that and walk away not changed. It's a beautiful moment."

Sowing Good Seeds in Prison

Shortly after her abusive marriage ended in divorce in 1981, Judy Henderson started dating a man she believed to be kind, God-fearing, and a positive influence on her two children. In retrospect, she realizes that she ignored several "red flags" about him that seem evident now, but didn't register back then.

As a result, Judy learned the hard way that the man she had fallen for possessed a serious dark side, one which ended up getting her convicted of a murder that he committed, while he got off scot-free.

Understandably, Judy was left feeling resentful and angry towards God for what He had allowed to happen to her. But her soul found new life after she attended a three-day Catholic Charities retreat that she initially resisted going to. She found her resentment was melted by the workers running the retreat, who sowed seeds of love in her heart.

"God became so real," Judy explained during a *Christopher Closeup* interview about her memoir *When the Light Finds Us: From a Life Sentence to a Life Transformed*. "I saw how they brought us food, they brought us all kinds of understanding. They didn't care what we were there for, they didn't even want to know...But when they washed our feet, that moment changed my life."

"Here they were kneeling down to me and show-

ing me a love that I hadn't known in a long time. I think that made me realize that this is the love I had been looking for, searching for, all my life: the God love. To fall in love with God, to fall in love with Jesus, to do His work, to do what He created me to do. If it took this journey to get me to that point, then I was willing to walk it and learn what it was I needed to learn."

Judy soon began sowing her own good seeds among her fellow inmates. As a professional hair-dresser, she started doing their hair and makeup, which led them to feel better about themselves.

Then she became a fitness trainer to help them get in shape and get any drugs out of their systems. She also earned certification as a paralegal, who appealed for—and often won—clemencies for them. She taught incarcerated mothers how to talk to their children and break the "generational curse" of abuse and crime which led them to prison in the first place. And she started a support group for battered women.

Though it took 36 years of appeals by Judy's attorney, she finally won her release in 2017, when the governor commuted her sentence after reviewing the details of the case, which even the original prosecutor came to see as unjust.

Some time later, Judy gave a talk at Catholic Charities of Kansas City-St. Joseph. The CEO offered her a job then and there because she had such a positive spirit that lacked anger or bitterness. Though Judy hadn't been looking for work, she accepted the offer because she now gets to continue serving God through serving others, sowing even more seeds of hope and faith.

All these stories serve as a reminder to take a careful look at your life, your talents, your struggles, and your blessings. Then, try to discern the ways in which God is calling you to sow good seeds that make this world a better place.


**"It's better to light one candle
than to curse the darkness."**

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*"Don't judge each day by the harvest you reap
but by the seeds that you plant."*

—Robert Louis Stevenson