

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

The Minister and the Ministry Sixteenth Week in Ordinary Time Wednesday,
July 23, 2014 8:15 AM **Jer 1:1, 4-10; Mt 13:1-9** (St. Bridget of Sweden) (God is
always sowing; some of it prospers. What are we willing to do for this great harvest?)

Today's two readings contrast **two different aspects of the Church's mission**. Jeremiah focuses on **the minister, the vocation**. The gospel focuses on the action of **the ministry itself. We need to look at both.**

In regard to **Jeremiah**, we see that he is, in a way, a symbol of all ministry because he is, first of all, **unsure of himself**—and who isn't? He is **not exactly willing either**, and makes excuses why he is too young and too inexperienced to do the work he is called to; and this of course reflects also the vocation of Moses, if you remember. In fact, there is no account I can think of where anyone is called by God and willingly responds, except the Blessed Mother. The rest all have excuses: Moses, Isaiah, Amos, Jeremiah—all reasons why they can't do what they are supposed to do. Well, **that's typical; that's human.**

Now God responds to that and says, "Baloney! Don't say you are too young. Where I send you, you will go and what I say, you will say." We have to keep that in mind that **the ministry's effectiveness does not rest on our abilities or talents**, although they are very helpful and useful in many cases. But they aren't the reason why the ministry succeeds. **The ministry succeeds because behind it is the work of God.** That's what the sower and the seed is about, the work of God. Ultimately it is God who is the sower. He uses people, true. **He uses various servants and instruments in getting his work done, but God is the sower.**

And **even God fails** all the time. God fails. Sometimes parents come in and they say, "I don't know what I did wrong, but my children are just a mess. I tried to teach them. I gave them good example. I sent them to the best schools. But look at them!" Well, that's the same

problem God has: the sower and the seed. The sower goes out, **sows seed all over the place, but only some of it really takes.** Why? Human beings are very inscrutable animals. **You can't figure out why human beings do what they do.** As parents and teachers and pastors we have to give the best possible formation we can give, the best possible motivation, the best possible support, but that is not going to ensure anything, absolutely nothing! And yet sometimes, in fact even often, people who have not been particularly well-trained, formed, educated, or supported become marvelous servants of God, terrific servants in the vineyard. And this is how people are gradually evangelized.

Right now **people look at the Church and they see it in many ways in reverse, failing to grasp the world and turn its attention to the gospel.** Well, in some sense this may be true. But that's because **we are in a great period of transition,** and all the cultural trappings of the past that were helpful in the past are no longer helpful. And all the ways in which the Church got used to doing things, which is very typically human as well, just aren't working any longer. **So new ways have to be developed.**

The harvest is assured. It will be a hundred- or sixty- or thirtyfold. That is actually miraculous; **it will be miraculous! Meanwhile, there will be lots of failures**—that's life. It always was. It was in the time of Christ. It was in the time of Jeremiah. It was in the time of Moses and Abraham and elsewhere, and at all times. That's the way it is. **God is always sowing; some of it prospers.** The sign of Jeremiah, however, asks us the question: **What are we willing to do for this great harvest?**