

The Fifteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time
Homily ~July 9-10, 2011
The Four “Rs”

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By a show of hands, how many of you went to a public school?
How many of you went to a Catholic or private school?
How many of you went to school?

In the so-called “good old days”—whenever and wherever those good old days were—public schools used to boast that they taught the “Three Rs”—**R**eading, **R**iting and **R**ithmetic (all taught to the tune of a hickory stick).

In Catholic schools, there were “Four Rs” taught—**R**eading, **R**iting, **R**ithmetic, and **R**eligion. In either case, a good education in the Three Rs or Four Rs took you anywhere you wanted to go.

There is another set of Rs that will get you farther than any destination. These Rs are the key survival skills of the 21st Century—**R**oots, **R**ituals, and **R**elationships. Jesus’ parable of “The Sower and the Seeds” suggests the power of these Rs is such that when all are positively present, they can bring us to the very brink of the Kingdom of Heaven.

What are some of the ingredients needed in the garden of our lives? I find three Rs.

The first of the Rs is **R**oots.

A batch of seeds cast in the parable fall onto the rocky ground. Immediately, they shoot up high stalks for there was virtually no soil for putting down roots, so all this frantic upward growth was in vain. The first day of scorching heat withered these high stalks. They had no root system to bring them nourishment and sustain them through the fierce blazing sun.

For many Americans, a deep grounding in roots is more poignant than for others. Since all Americans, except Native Americans, originally came from somewhere else, we take pains to know whether we are Scotch-Irish or Polish-Sicilian or Hungarian, or Swahili-Tutsi. We want part of whom we are to reflect where we come from.

Likewise, Christians need to get in touch with their roots to understand who has gone before us, to know who brought the Faith forward to this time—a fascinating root system that is now nearly 2,000 years old. That is why I am an advocate of laying a good foundation in early childhood education. Our preschools and kindergarten at St. John do just that. They are helping our little ones to get roots. We are laying a great foundation. So too are our children and youth in elementary school, middle school, and high school. How invaluable is the foundation of roots that we extend through religious education, Edge, and now the Vacation Bible School at Blessed Sacrament the week of July 18.

While we do not need to memorize every branch, we need to recognize that it is in creating these roots we provide the solid ground we stand on. Roots are just as crucial to human beings as they are to plants. Even in this restless U-Haul culture, we must develop a sense of who we are based on where we come from.

A second of the Rs is **Rituals**.

None of us can survive in a life that is barren of beauty and empty of ritual. We need special markings and moments to help us define the passing of our days. To this end, all of us create rituals that help guide us forward and bring us back again.

The Church is steeped in ritual. What a rich heritage we have as Catholics, the rituals of our Faith. I am saddened when folks walk away from the Church or stay away as if there is nothing here. There is so much. It is a Mystery; the more you look at it, the more there is to appreciate. I am looking forward to the inauguration of the new Missal. It will help us to revisit many of these rituals and to rediscover what they should mean, hopefully giving us greater purpose in being faith-filled the Catholic Christian way.

The third of the Rs is **Relationships**.


The third batch of seeds described in Jesus' story had a short life because of the company they kept. There was nothing wrong with the soil these seeds fell upon. It was deep enough, soft enough, and rich enough to sustain. But this soil also supported a fine crop of thorns and thistles. These prickly neighbors were stronger and more vigorous than the seeds of our parable. In the race for survival, the thorns won choking out their neighboring plants.

Relationships are tricky things. We cannot live without them; but we are hopelessly interconnected creatures. From the day we are born, we are enmeshed with the lives of others.

Home is best seen, not as a place where you have to go, but where you want to go. Not a place where they have to take you in, but where they want to take you in, where you are welcomed by the people. Home is where the heart is.

I consider the Church our home. That is why my hope is that we continue to make every effort to make everyone who comes into this place feel welcome. Our theme “All Are Welcome” must become not just words but reality.

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