



Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time A July 12, 2020

- ◆ **The Parables of Jesus**
- ◆ **Reflections on the Parable of the Sower**
- ◆ **A New Book by Matthew Kelly**
- ◆ **Blessed Luigi and Maria Quattrocchi's Ordinary and Extraordinary life**

Chapter 13 in Matthew's Gospel is sometimes called "the day of parables." He presents us with seven parables that are all focused on the Kingdom of God. They are parables seeking to give us a glimpse into the nature of the Kingdom that Jesus is inaugurating.

Parables have been called "an earthly story with a heavenly meaning." Jesus tells a story and then challenges the listener to figure out the message for him/herself. On the other hand, parables can, in the words of William Barclay, *conceal truth from those who are either too lazy to think or too blinded by prejudice to see*. It puts the responsibility fairly and squarely on the individual. It *reveals* truth to those who desire truth; it *conceals* truth from those who do not wish to see the truth (Commentary on Matthew, Vol.2, p. 13).

Today's parable of the sower is very much based on the everyday experiences of the audience. They often see sowers sowing seed. The main point of the parable is God's offer of his Kingdom (salvation) to *all*. God is the Sower and we are the soil – of different types. If the seed falls on good soil (an open heart), it will likely produce an incredible harvest. Jesus encourages his audience to be good soil, receptive to his message. Jesus' offer of the Kingdom to *all* people would have stretched the mindset of those who believed that only the Jews belonged in the Kingdom. The parable invites each listener to look into his/her heart to see what kind of soil he/she is and to see how open and responsive he/she is to Jesus and his message.

In section two (verses 10-17) of today's Gospel, Jesus responds to the question as to why he teaches in parables. This is one of the most difficult sections in the whole of Matthew's Gospel because in it Jesus appears to be saying that God deliberately blinds the eyes and hardens the hearts of some from hearing and understanding his Word. The truth is, of course, that Jesus wants everyone to hear, understand, and follow his

message. But, unfortunately, that does not always happen because of the spiritual condition of people's hearts.

Those who have open, receptive hearts will hear and understand and bear much fruit. These are also the people to whom 'more will be given.' They will be given more as they grow in openness and receptivity to God's Word.

On the other hand, those with unreceptive hearts, those with closed and hardened hearts, will miss the message of the parables, and so the little they have will be taken from them.

Jesus then says that Isaiah had the same problem as he has. He too had to deal with people who closed their minds to his message. Then Jesus calls attention to the great privilege the disciples have in hearing and understanding what righteous men and women in the past longed to see and hear.

In the third and final section of today's Gospel (verses 18-23), Jesus speaks about the various kinds of soil on which the seed falls and the factors that prevent the Word from bearing fruit abundantly. The Evil One may come and steal the Word. Also, the Word may not take root because of persecution, preoccupation with other things, including the loss of riches. Even though four types of soil or persons are envisioned, it is more realistic to understand each seed as belonging to all of us. At one time or another, each of us can lose the Word to the Evil One. We can be enthusiastic but not persevering, and we may allow the pursuit of material things to distract us from paying attention to our soul. But then at some time, the Word may bear abundant fruit in our lives.

A New Book by Matthew Kelly

Bestselling author and well known speaker Mathew Kelly has recently released a new book called: *I Heard God Laugh*.

The inside cover of the book reads:

Most of us are trying to put together the jigsaw puzzle we call life without a very important piece. Over time this becomes incredibly frustrating. In this extraordinary book, Matthew Kelly powerfully

demonstrates that we cannot live the life we have imagined, or experience the joy we yearn for, unless we learn to tend the soul. From there, with his classic style of practical wisdom, he teaches us how to remedy this problem.

When our bodies are hungry, our stomachs growl. When our souls are hungry, we become irritable, restless, confused, overwhelmed, exhausted, anxious, discontent, and tend to focus on the things that matter least and neglect the things that matter most.

Are you taking care of your soul? Are you feeding it and nurturing it? Or are you ignoring it and neglecting it?

*The reality is, most people have never really been taught how to tend their souls. **I Heard God Laugh** will help you to do just that, and so much more.*

If you ever wondered how Matthew Kelly has been able to write and speak the way he has over the past three decades, he is about to share his secret with you. As he shares what transformed his life, along with intimate details of his own journey and struggle, he teaches us how to apply the great spiritual lessons learned to our own lives.

At every turn he floods the reader with hope and demonstrates unmistakably that the best is yet to come!

An excerpt: Habit and Potential

I started to read Kelly's new book a week ago. I loved this piece on *Habit and Potential*—I am only sharing here an excerpt from this section of the book.

Our lives change when our habits change. For better or for worse, habits are one of the most powerful influences in our lives. Our lives rise and fall more on our habits than on circumstances beyond our control. There is so much uncertainty in life so much that is beyond our circle of influence but with our habits we get to exercise our God-given free will and shape our destiny.

Earlier, we briefly discussed the idea of your past and your potential. You are not what has happened to you. You are not your accomplishments. You are not even who you are today or who you have become so far. You are who and what you are still capable of becoming. You are your realized and unrealized potential. God sees you and all your potential, and he aches to see you embrace your best, truest, highest self. He yearns to help you and accompany you in that quest....

"I am who I am," some people say. But this is a half-truth. You are who you are, but you are also who you are capable of becoming—and you have amazing potential. You may not see it. You may feel stuck or trapped, and you may be right now. But you do not have to stay stuck or trapped. God and your potential are

ready to pull you out of all that with this new habit of daily prayer. Our potential is unleashed with new habits. Habits unlock our potential, and no habit does this like daily prayer. And this is only one of many qualities that make it life's essential daily habit.

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Cost: USA \$17.99. The book is also available from Blue Sparrow as an audiobook and on eBook.

The Married Way to Holiness

The following article about a wonderful couple appeared in the June 2020 edition of *The Word Among Us*. It is written by Woodene Koenig-Bricker, a freelance writer and frequent contributor to *The Word Among Us*.

Not long after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, Pope St. John Paul II presided over the beatification of a married couple who lived in Rome during an earlier time of global uncertainty and impending war. It was the Catholic Church's first joint beatification of a married couple who lived ordinary family life: Luigi and Maria Beltrame Quattrocchi.

To emphasize their joint intercession as husband and wife, one miraculous healing had been accepted on behalf of them both. They also share the same feast day—their wedding anniversary—by special request of John Paul II.

John Paul told the crowd assembled that even during difficult years, Luigi and Maria Beltrame Quattrocchi "kept the lamp of the faith burning—lumen Christi—and passed it on to their four children," three of whom were present for the beatification. He was talking about the light that shines in all married couples who have lived ordinary yet extraordinary lives of faith and sacrifice.

Devout People of Means. *Maria Luisa Corsini was born on June 12, 1884, in Florence, Italy. Her mother was "lively and domineering," while her father, an officer in the Royal Army, was noted for his bad temper. Maria, no shrinking violet herself, once told her father, "You know, Papa, I would never have married you like Mama did, with your bad temper."*

Born into a family of means, Maria was well educated: in literature, languages, and the Catholic faith. After obtaining a commerce degree at La Sapienza, one of the best universities in Rome, she taught at the university level and wrote several books about education and family life. She was always devout and incorporated her religious convictions into work at her parish, St. Vitale, and in the Catholic Action movement.

Luigi Beltrame was born on January 12, 1880, in Catania, Sicily. Luigi's uncle, Luigi Quattrocchi, could not have children, so he asked if he could raise his namesake as his own. Luigi's parents agreed, and eventually he

added “Quattrocchi” to his name out of respect for his uncle. Like Maria, Luigi received a fine education. He obtained a law degree from La Sapienza and worked as an attorney for the Italian government after graduation. Unlike Maria, however, he was not especially devout as a young man.

Luigi and Maria met as a result of their families’ friendship. Whatever their acquaintance was at first, a turning point occurred when Luigi became very ill. Maria, who must have been quite concerned, wrote to him and included a picture of the Madonna of Pompeii. They became close, and within the year, he asked for Maria’s hand. They married at the Basilica of St. Mary Major in Rome on November 25, 1905.

A Scare—and a Choice. Although Luigi traveled a great deal for business, he and Maria began to have children in rapid succession. But Maria’s fourth pregnancy brought a devastating diagnosis: placenta previa, a complication of pregnancy that can be fatal for both mother and child. Maria was only four months into her pregnancy, and she was hemorrhaging. The doctor recommended bed rest—and an abortion. Despite their doctor’s urgings, the couple both refused the abortion and placed their hope in God.

It was a heartbreaking and frightening decision. Maria had only a 5 percent chance of survival, they were told. The possibility that Luigi would soon be a widower with three small children loomed large. One of his children caught him weeping as he unburdened his soul to a priest. But to everyone’s shock and surprise, both Maria and her daughter, Enrichetta, survived the birth. Luigi and Maria thanked God. Maria had always been devout, but with the arrival of this miracle, Luigi too became increasingly devoted to Jesus.

Pious, but Not Excessively. The couple’s intention was to raise children who loved God and one another. Using their means, they made sure that the children enjoyed sports vacations, and other family activities. But the spiritual life received equal attention. They instituted daily Mass, a family holy hour in honor of the Sacred Heart on first Fridays, night prayer vigils, and retreats at the Monastery of St. Paul Outside the Walls. But as pious as these activities may have been, the Quattrocchis were not stuffy; their family dinners were famously noisy occasions.

In *Radiography of a Marriage* (1952), Maria wrote, “Educating children is the ‘art of all arts’ and brings along serious difficulties. But one thing is certain: as two bodies in one, we both aimed at their best, ready to avoid everything that could harm them. This implied some personal sacrifices.”

Luigi, for his part, stopped smoking during his children’s upbringing. Both he and Maria curtailed their disagreements and discussed them in private so that their children would not see them argue. Enrichetta recalled, “It is obvious to think that at times they had differences of opinion, but we, their children, were never exposed to these. They solved their problems between themselves

through conversation, so that once they came to an agreement, the atmosphere continued to be serene.”

Maria and Luigi were always careful to entrust their children to God. When any of the four faced problems, their parents always encouraged them first and foremost to “appeal to the heavens” in prayer. Maria and Luigi said they wanted their children to appreciate heavenly realities: life “from the roof up,” as they called it. And by all accounts, this occurred. Their three eldest children entered religious life. In the words of their son Cesare, who became a Trappist monk, “There was always a supernatural, serene, and happy atmosphere in our home, but not excessively pious.”

Faith Expressed through Action. Both Maria and Luigi believed that the gospel was preached as much by action as by words. Luigi once wrote, “It is through honesty and the Christian spirit that permeate our conduct in human relations ... that we profess to men our religious convictions.”

Luigi was among the first Italians to become involved with the scouting movement in 1916. He became the first president of the general assembly in 1918 and helped to establish a scouting group for the poor of Rome, which his sons joined.

In business too, Luigi conducted himself with a Christian ethos. A man of great ability, integrity, and virtue, he never spoke of the professional honors that he was given. He also steadfastly refused positions of higher authority that might compromise his duties to God and his household.

Maria was always busy. She took part in the general council of the Italian Catholic Women’s Association, volunteered as a nurse for the Red Cross, and involved herself in parish activities. Together, they also helped to prepare other young couples for marriage, and during World War II, they turned their apartment into a shelter for Jews and other refugees.

Not without Struggles. Despite the obvious holiness of their lives, the Quattrocchis were not plaster saints. The daughter of challenging parents, Maria was sometimes described as “aggressive.” Luigi, who was of a milder disposition, could appear “nervous” at times. Although they always wanted the best for each other, they didn’t always agree. Maria disapproved, for instance, when Luigi resumed his smoking habit after their children had grown. Another area of difficulty later in life stemmed from a vow that Maria made to do “whatever was most perfect.” This included the renunciation of marital relations during the later portion of their marriage—a practice that the Church would counsel firmly against today.

Another area where the Quattrocchis showed their humanity was with regard to their children’s vocations. Their daughter Stefania reported that when her brothers entered religious life, her father was so saddened by their absence that he became physically ill.

Luigi died of a heart attack in 1951 at age 71. At his funeral, a friend of his who had been an atheist said to the Quattrocchi sons, “Your father never pestered me with sermons. But I want to tell you: it’s through his life that I discovered God and that I love the Gospel. Pray for me!”

After this, Maria increased her writing and volunteer work. Always combining faith with action, she served on trains carrying sick and disabled persons to Lourdes. She wrote books about marriage and articles for Catholic magazines and participated in an Italian Catholic movement called Movement for a Better World. She died in 1965 in the presence of Enrichetta, the daughter for whom she had risked her life.

A Model of “Walking Together.” *As Pope St. John Paul II said, the Quattrocchis “lived married love and service to life in the light of the gospel and with great human intensity.” Their story calls to mind the many similar stories all around us. Every hardworking parent who returns from a long shift to see their children off to bed, every concerned parent and grandparent who pray for their adult children, and every family whose work and recreation are punctuated with loving service to their parish and to people in need—these are the “Quattrocchis” all around us. They may not be “Blesseds” of the Church yet, but they are surely blessed, as are all people who see the light of these families shine.*

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Luigi and Maria Beltrame Quattrocchi

Have a blessed week,

Fr. Sean