

Galatians 6:7-8

It's not very often that the Fourth of July falls on a Sunday. This does not mean that we honor country over God today. But we can certainly honor God by speaking of, and thanking Him for, our home and country. Tonight millions of Americans will go somewhere to watch fireworks. It's a good tradition. And yet one may wonder how many of all those who celebrate the Fourth, do so in remembrance and thankfulness. Independence was declared this day in 1776. Is that why people go to the lake, have barbeques, and watch fireworks? Or has this day, like so many other holidays, become nothing more than an excuse to relax and have fun?

147 years ago today fireworks were going off, but the people were not shouting out "ooh's" and "aah's." They were groaning. They were dying. Guns and cannons, not spectacular skyrockets, were making all the fireworks. In the town of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania a battle was still raging. And when the War Between the States was finally over, more than 600,000 young men lay dead. The fathers of the American Revolution had taught their children well. Independence is worth dying for. Sadly, for them, they also believed it was worth killing your neighbor, your friend, and your relative for.

Even today, July 4th, 2010, young men are dying to preserve our independence. Soldiers are fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan. My own son flew to West Point yesterday for ten days of training in Air Assault School as part of the National Guard. When a country has to fight in order to begin its birth as a nation (which we did), then the seeds of war and bloodshed are sown deeply into that country. Truly every generation who has lived on this soil has witnessed the horrors of war. This is, we can say, a necessary evil. To preserve our nation's independence it was necessary for the seeds of war to be sown deep into our people.

But this is not the way it should be within the church. Love, gentleness, kindness, forgiveness...the gifts of the Spirit...these are the seeds that, God speaking through His apostle says, should be sown within the hearts and lives of Christian people. "You reap what you sow." It's as simple as that. When our forefathers rebelled against Mother England, they sowed the seeds of violence into our nation. Now we must always fight to stay free. But that is not how you began life as a child of God. In your baptism the seed of God's Word was sown within you. God's Spirit gave you life, not death; the love of God, not wrath and punishment; peace and joy, not lust and bitterness; forgiveness and mercy, not anger and hatred. You did not begin life as a Christian the way our nation began. God did not sow within you the seeds of war, bloodshed, and violence. He sowed within you the good gifts of His Spirit, the seeds of His Kingdom of Grace.

So why aren't we reaping what has been sown? Why do Christian people everywhere so easily forsake God for the things of this world? Why do congregations such as ours struggle to keep their members honoring the Lord's Day? Why do you and I, daily, do what is wrong in God's eyes even though we know it's wrong? Why do we have within our hearts all kinds of sinful lusts? Why do we act like God's people in here, but so quickly shed our Christian clothing out there?

It's because, along with the seed of God's Word, the seeds of the evil one are also being sown within us. And we don't seem to mind at all. We not only watch, but look forward to watching, television shows and movies where God's commandments are dragged through the mud. We not only listen, but we join in with conversations where God's name is not respected and gossip is spread about other people. We allow the influence of this sinful world around us to dictate how we live, not the Word and will of God.

But do not be deceived. "God is not mocked," our text says, "Whatever you sow, that you will also reap. The one who sows to his own flesh, will from the flesh reap corruption. But the one who sows to the Spirit, will from the Spirit reap eternal life." Every day of your life the devil is planting his seeds within you. Through other people, through television and the mass media, through the magazines you look at, through your own sinful thoughts...the devil never stops sowing his seeds of corruption. Unless you combat against that, unless you go to where God is sowing His good seeds, what harvest do you think your life will produce?

A Christian who avoids going to church where God is actively sowing the seeds of His Spirit, who avoids reading the Scriptures in his home, who is, maybe without realizing it, shutting God and His good seeds out of his heart and life, is soil which is easy planting for the devil. And the seeds which the devil plants always war against the good seeds of God. Like vicious weeds, the seeds of lust and bitterness, hatred and jealousy, spiritual laziness and sinful pride, attempt to choke out and overtake the good seeds of God within you.

What can we do? Our eternal salvation is at stake! Every chance you get, where God's good seed is being sown, be there with receptive ears and hearts. God is not your enemy; Satan is. God's seed is good for you; the devil's seed destroys. God's called pastor, no matter what you think of him, is here for you. Through him God sows the good seeds of His Spirit. "You reap what you sow." Those who avoid church and Holy Communion, who avoid Bible Study, stay away from the loving God where He is at work planting His good seeds. Let this not be true of you.

Take heart. Have courage. Today you are here where God is sowing His seeds. His words coming into you are keeping the devil at bay. His seeds are giving you strength to live this week as His Christian. His Holy Sacrament, like a seed planted within you, this week fights against the seeds of the evil one. His words of grace declare for you true independence--freedom from the power of sin. God forgives all the sins of your past freely, out of pure grace for Jesus' sake...not so you can go back and live in them again, but that you can live with Christ.

Jesus' whole life was lived in the Spirit of God for you. He was planted, buried into death for you like a seed, so that on Easter when He sprang forth from the ground, His life, His resurrection would be yours in your baptism. Jesus lives within you...unless, God forbid, you are rejecting Him by shutting His Word and Spirit out. He is, through His Sacraments and living Word, planted as a seed within you.

You did not do this...God did. And He will reap what He has sown. Because He sowed Christ Jesus within you, He will reap from you the life His Son gives--a life which has no end, a life fed and nourished here by His Word and Sacrament, a life lived in joy and peace. A life fully forgiven in Christ.

Let's be clear on this. If it was only us...you and me alone in this world...we would have no chance. Our lives would be jungles full of the devil's full-grown seeds. But God is your strength. And not God out there somewhere--God right here in the sowing of His seeds. And because God is for you, you have nothing to be afraid of. God's seeds are more powerful than the devil's seeds.

Is your life a perfect garden right now? Is it neat and tidy with no weeds...everything good, right, and holy? Not yours nor mine. The devil's seeds are right there with God's seeds. The devil's plants are

growing, sometimes hidden, sometimes out in the open for all to see in our lives. Your life, and mine, is far from perfect, and it never will be this side of heaven.

Do not despair. God forgives you for your lust and bitterness, for your pride and jealousy, for your anger and spiritual laziness. That's why Jesus died...for you. Now do not let the devil have his way with you. Make it difficult for him to sow his evil seeds within you. Stay away from that which God has forgiven you of. And above all, stay where God is at work. Keep your ears and eyes and mouth desiring the good seeds of His Spirit, for He will then, in the end, reap what He has sown--a harvest of eternal life within you. Amen.