

I had two uncles who were farmers up in Iowa. Neither one understood how there could be a farmer who wasn't a Christian. They worked hard each day and, as a boy, I was impressed by this. But what made even more of an impact on me is this very simple truth that they taught me: A farmer's time is best spent down on his knees in prayer.

They learned this from their fathers who were also farmers. Yet they learned this as well from Jesus. Speaking of a farmer here in our text, He says: "*(The man) scatters seed on the ground. He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how.*"

It's out of his hands. He can sow the seed, but after that, it's in the hands of the Lord. A farmer cannot make the seed sprout and grow. He cannot control the weather. But he can get down on his knees and pray that God will bless what has been sown and that, in the Fall, he will enjoy a bountiful harvest.

What is true of farmers is true of fathers, and also of spiritual fathers – those who sow the seed of God's Word. Is not a father's time also best spent on his knees in prayer? And when I say fathers, I include mothers.

A farmer has no control over the growth of his crops. He does what he can. But it truly is in God's hands. A father, a Christian father, also does what he can so that his children grow in the love and fear of the Lord. But he will learn, sooner or later, that his children, as with a farmer's crops, are completely in God's hands. No father can control every part of his children's lives. That would be like controlling the weather.

A farmer will suffer agony over his crops during a drought or a severe hailstorm. The same kind of agony a father suffers when his children are hit by the hailstorms of the evils of this world, and when they suffer the drought of Jesus' Word and Sacraments; his children choosing to live apart from Jesus' Church and His gifts for them. This, truly, is a severe spiritual drought, for the refreshing rain of the Holy Spirit is no longer falling upon them. True Christian fathers suffer real agony for their children during these times of drought.

Spiritual fathers, those who sow the seed of God's Word, also suffer this same kind of agony. Pastors would soon be overcome with grief if they were not able to give their dear children – the members of their congregation – over to the Lord in prayer.

Your own pastor has learned that the more time he spends in prayer for you, the better he is able to "*sleep and rise each night and day.*" He is not able to make the seed of God's Word sprout and grow within you. Trust me, he wishes he could. But that would be a great evil. For how horrible it would be for you if the growth of God's Word in you was in the hands and control of your pastor! No, much better that your spiritual father learns to be patient and to put his trust in the Lord, even though he will suffer much agony because of the hailstorms and droughts that come into your lives.

When a farmer looks out over his crops after a hailstorm, or during a severe drought, he very easily can feel like a failure. Even though what happened to his crops was out of his hands, you will have a hard time convincing him that there was nothing more he could have done for his crops.

And so with Christian fathers. How easy it is for them to feel like failures. When they stand and look out over their children after a hailstorm of great evil has befallen them, or during a severe spiritual drought, they cannot help but think to themselves: "I could have done more. I should have seen this coming. I have failed my children!" And perhaps they have. Farmers, fathers and mothers, pastors – who among us has not failed in some way?

But growth belongs to the Lord. Crops, children, congregations – they grow usually in spite of us, in spite of our failures. And it's because these are all in the hands and care of the Lord.

The only one who never failed is Jesus. And that's why you are blessed to be in His hands. And also because His hands are the only hands that were pierced with nails for you. He who never failed in anything, suffered and died for your failures and mine. And because He did, God forgives your failures, all of them. In whatever way you have failed as a father, mother, son, daughter, God forgives you. And all those times you failed God – failed to obey Him, and serve Him, and love Him – all of these failures, sins, trespasses, God forgives you for them all.

This is not an excuse to do your worst – because you are forgiven. No! Rather, because you believe that God forgives you, you will desire to do your best; to strive not to fail in whatever you do.

The harvest is coming, perhaps sooner than we realize. But right now, it's the growing season. This is symbolized by the green color hanging from the altar, pulpit, and lectern. Because it's the season to grow in the Word of God, we work hard in sowing the Seed whether we are fathers and mothers, pastors, or something else. And because the growth belongs to the Lord, now in the growing season we need to spend much of our time down on our knees in prayer. And doing this, we can look forward with joyful hearts to the harvest. Amen.