

## 15<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

### Homily

There was a time in this country when Christianity had never been heard of, and Christian missionaries arrived to "evangelise" the heathen – great figures like St. Columba and St. Aidan and St. Cuthbert and St. Ninian, in the sixth and seventh centuries.

Some of the stories of these saints give the impression that they just went wandering around delivering powerful sermons in village squares and so on, and that everybody immediately cast off their pagan ways and rushed forward to be baptised.

The larger picture is much more complicated and it's clear that they didn't achieve anything overnight.

Preaching the gospel in those days was a long haul, and there were plenty of setbacks. Very often their work was **undone**, and a new set of missionaries had to start all over again. There were very few mass conversions, and the success-rate of genuine conversions to the Christian faith was always very small.

Christ predicted that the task of proclaiming his message would meet with little success, relatively speaking.

As a parable about the activity of "evangelisation" the parable of the sower predicts something like a ninety percent failure rate. Most people are interested in other things. Other distractions absorb their attention. They might show a bit of interest to begin with, and a bit of commitment, but that soon fades away.

Jesus knew about this from his own experience, and he warned his apostles to expect the same. So there's no reason why we should be demoralised when we experience it as well.

We just have to stick at it, the way people like St. Aidan and St. Cuthbert did.

In the circumstances of their time, they started little monasteries, little communities of dedicated Christians, little centres of Christian faith. They won people over by the example of their way of life, rather than by any big preaching campaigns.

In very different circumstances, our parishes could perform the same kind of function. If people want to know what the Christian message is about, they should be able to look at the Christian community and get an accurate picture.

We don't have to live like monks in the seventh century to be good and holy, and to support each other in our faith. Those are basic Christian options we are all obliged to make, and in the role of sowing the seeds of the gospel in the face of a lot of indifference and apathy, I don't think we need to aim at anything more grandiose than establishing ourselves as little centres of Christian faith and living, little communities of dedicated Christians.