

Commentary on the Gospel for Wed, Jan 24th 2018

Memorial of Saint Francis de Sales, Bishop and Doctor of the Church

After Jesus himself takes the time to explain the parable, it might seem presumptuous to comment on today's gospel reading. But it will be worthwhile calling attention to one point Jesus does not elaborate on.

After several flawed scenarios, which Jesus does explain, he presents "optimal soil conditions". I suspect that at this point one would expect "optimal yield", which for many of us would mean hundredfold every time. Yet in Matthew's version of the parable [13: 1-9] we are told that under optimal soil conditions the yield was thirtyfold, sixtyfold, hundredfold. This means that, even with the best soil, the yield depends on the strain of seed planted. Our part is to prepare the soil to make it optimal, but it is the Lord's choice to decide on the strain of grain to be planted in us.

Thus comparison in the spiritual life is both pointless and deceiving. Pointless, because we do not have a gauge to assess the quality of the seed planted. It is also deceiving, because we do not have a basis for such comparison. When we think that we are yielding "only" thirtyfold or sixtyfold, we may be looking at our optimal yield. When we presume to judge others' apparent thirtyfold or sixtyfold yield, we simply do not know what their optimal yield is supposed to be.

We are certainly in no position to judge yields. Spirituality by comparison just does not make sense. When, after breakfast with Jesus on the lake shore, Peter asked him about his nearby fellow apostle –the beloved disciple, Jesus told him effectively: that is none of your business, Peter, you follow me. Instead of comparing, we should focus on preparing our own soil to provide its optimum yield in our following of Jesus, whatever that optimum yield might be for us.

Luis Rodriguez, S.J.-Creighton University's Retreat Center