

Dear God, as we say in the Eucharistic prayer, your Word has never been silent. Thank you for all of the words you have spoken from the beginning of creation

With high hopes, I planted some cosmos flower seeds this spring. Feeling smugly organized, I managed to start them inside in March, imagining how nice their tall, white shapes would look at the back of my garden. even bought a special grow light.

Well the peppers and tomatoes came right up but not one single cosmos seed germinated.

I've always heard how easy they are to grow but I guess I don't have the right touch.

Maybe people who run greenhouses have a higher success rate with their seeds.

No gardener expects a 100% return on the seeds they plant.

Some seeds are duds, some go too deep or not deep enough or as it says in the parable of the sower, some seeds get eaten by birds, some fall on rocky ground or amongst thistles.

I was thinking about seeds and gardening as I was reading the passage from James that we heard this morning, "...welcome with meekness the implanted word that has the power to save your souls."

The implanted word. That has such a lovely sound to it.

It's a word that's not just planted but **implanted**.

That syllable "im" has such a permanent sound to it.

It's not just scattered over the ground with the hope that some of the word or seed, if you will, will actually produce a plant.

No, it's carefully placed into each one of us.

I imagine God's gigantic thumb, if God has anything like a thumb, taking each word, one by one, and carefully and firmly pressing them into the soil of our bodies, pushing them down deep so that no wind or water or birds will carry them away.

The implanted word. You know, if you Google the word "implant" you come up with an amazing and sometimes horrifying array of things that can be implanted in our bodies – some with obvious medical benefits and others with cosmetic or other sketchier benefits.

There are all kinds of implants out there –  
knees, hips, breasts, teeth, cheeks, both facial and otherwise –  
lower jaws, corneas, biceps and one especially memorable website  
described a man who had a metal Mohawk with spikers implanted in his head.  
So there's no end of things we can put into our bodies.  
And as permanent as many of those things are advertised to be, they aren't.  
The silicone can deteriorate or get lumpy or migrate, as they so gently put it,  
or the hip joint gives out.  
All these different kinds of implants but the only one that really matters  
is the implanted word of God. It has no cosmetic or medical benefits. It doesn't lift  
or tighten or decorate.  
It's not made of the latest synthetic. It's just a word.  
But we might imagine that this word is not just a small letter word  
but the Word of God, with a capital W, Jesus Christ himself,  
and that his being is planted deep within us.  
How marvelous to think of God residing, abiding, deep within us,  
not temporarily or occasionally but as permanent a dwelling as can be imagined.

So this word, or to continue the gardening analogy, this seed is there.  
Now what happens?  
Does it have an automatic start button  
so that it takes root and grows on its own initiative?  
No, it's like the seeds we sow in our own gardens.  
It needs some additives, if you will, it's going to produce anything.  
It can just sit there, ignored, for 80 or so years,  
with nary a root or leaf, much less a flower.  
It needs the equivalent of sun and rain and nutrients if it's going to grow.  
One of the things that helps it to grow,  
according to the author of James, is meekness. Meekness, huh?  
Yeah, that's something I really want to be known for, meekness.  
But the meekness that the author is speaking about  
is the humility to know that everything we are and have comes from God.  
And you know the word humility comes from the word humus, or soil,  
so the gardening image has a double emphasis.  
Meekness is the opposite of pride  
and pride is probably the most effective pesticide, there is.  
It kills any sort of appreciation for all that God has done.  
It puts itself first, before others.  
It imagines that it can do it all by itself.  
It doesn't need other people and it certainly doesn't need God.

Pride has no gratitude or joy.  
It's constantly grasping and shoving and giving worth to things that are worthless.  
When we forget that we owe everything to God,  
we run the risk of mixing up our priorities  
and we and everyone we encounter, suffer as a consequence.  
God's word just cannot grow under a deluge of pride  
and really, every sin is just a subset of pride.  
And it's a pretty fierce weed if I could put it that way,  
probably comparable to bindweed,  
able to grow just about anywhere,  
sending out long tough roots that are almost impossible to get rid of.  
Or to use another unfortunately familiar image, we could compare pride to a virus.  
because pride can take on a seemingly benign and even salutary aspect,  
as in, of course you need to look out for #1.  
If you don't, who is? That's just being smart.  
If you don't, all the other people will get there before you do, wherever there is.  
We get bathed in that kind of advice all the time.  
So it's not easy seeking the way of meekness or humility.  
It's like traveling north if you want to go south,  
or maybe even losing your life to save it?  
God is asking something from us.  
The flourishing of God's word in us is not automatic, not without effort.

The author of James also rightly reminds us that we must be doers of the word.  
Each time we act with compassion,  
the seed inside gets a little more sun  
and a few more ounces of nitrogen and potassium.  
We aren't acting compassionately to earn God's love  
but we are called to act compassionately to cooperate with God's love.  
Sometimes when we hear that God's love is unconditional  
we consider it the proverbial free lunch  
and we almost resent any effort our faith might ask of us.  
The author of James is very clear throughout this letter  
that our faith is brought to completion by our works.  
God does love us and God's love is without condition  
but it is not without cost.

The author of James states that God's word, that seed inside us,  
has the power to save our souls.  
God's word has power but not the kind of power

that gets Warren Buffett to return your phone calls  
or Elon Musk to meet you for lunch.

It's only the kind of power that created everything that is,  
that formed the universe and breathes life into every creature. That's all.

When the author of James says the word of God has the power to save our souls  
it might sound like some kind of salvation scheme  
where the good are separated from the bad  
or the saved from the unsaved after we die.

But that is not what Christianity is.

The life of faith is a vocation to share the fate of God for the life of the world –  
to suffer and be joyful and in the process  
to discover who we truly are and who God is.

Our vocations are not teaching or gardening or parenting.

Our vocation, our real vocation, is to be co-creators with God  
and to give thanks for everything –

something as small as that tiny but powerful word implanted in you  
and something as vast as the universe,  
to join with the cosmic body of Christ and to say thank you. Amen.