

Column

In the familiar Parable of the Seed and the Sower, Jesus describes four types of ground onto which the seed of the Gospel may fall: the hard ground, the stony ground, the cluttered ground and the good ground. Each corresponds to conditions of the human heart.

Within the human family today there remains these four; human nature, after all, has not changed that much over the past 2000 years. But perhaps “cluttered” best represents the state of the human heart in the 21st Century. Our lives are littered with fears brought on by violence and war on the international scene, concerns over the economy at home and by general busyness and the never-ending quest for more.

Concerning the latter – the quest for more – all around us are voices vying for our attention. Many are trying to get us to buy this product or that with the subtle suggestion that each is the pathway to happiness, health and fulfilment. Indeed, from here to the end of the year these voices will become more incessant. They will seek to divert our attention from the sacred to the secular.

Instead of having us celebrate All Saints’ Day (Nov. 1), the Christian feast which focuses on that great cloud of witnesses that no man can number . . . those who have gone before us in the faith . . . they will try to divert our attention to the eve of All Saints’ Day, commonly called Halloween.

Now don’t get me wrong, there is nothing wrong with children putting on costumes, going to parties and carving pumpkins. These activities are innocent enough in themselves. The tragedy comes when we miss the *rest of the story*, that being that Christ has triumphed over the dark and shadowy spectres of the soul. Fear and death, represented by the masked and grotesque

figures of Halloween, have been conquered. In Him, we can have victory over them. More than that, we don't walk through this world alone: we walk in the company of Christ and the saints. In the words of Hebrews 12:1: "Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us".

The same voices of distraction will try to do the same thing with Thanksgiving and Christmas. Instead of calling us to gratitude on our national day of thanksgiving, they will seek to divert us to secondary things—food, parades and football. Again, the secondary things may be good, but they are not the best, and may become clutter if we are not careful.

The same danger is present with Christmas. The voices that seek to divert our attention from the saints of light to the spectres of darkness on All Hallow's Eve and from gratitude to gluttony on Thanksgiving, will try to divert our attention from the Gift to gifts on Christmas.

Beware of clutter. In the living room, it can be dangerous to your physical health. You may trip and fall as you seek to step over it. In the soul it can be dangerous to your spiritual health. It can cause you to miss the best for the merely good.

O ALMIGHTY and most merciful God, of thy bountiful goodness keep us, we beseech thee, from all things that may hurt us; that we, being ready both in body and soul, may cheerfully accomplish those things which thou commandest; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (Collect for the 20th Sunday after Trinity, Book of Common Prayer).

The Rev. Victor H. Morgan is rector of St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Blue Ridge.