

**Homily for the Association of Catholic Diocesan Archivists
University of St. Mary Lady of the Lake - Mundelein Seminary
July 20, 2022 AD - Wednesday of the 16th Week in Ordinary Time, Year 2**

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My dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

As your Episcopal Moderator, it is good to be with you for this Mass in conjunction with your conference this week for the Association of Catholic Diocesan Archivists. It is always a pleasure for me to return to this campus where I was a seminarian and especially to this chapel of Saint Mary of the Lake where I was ordained a deacon and a priest right here in this sanctuary.

During my twenty-five years as a priest of the Archdiocese of Chicago, it was my privilege for eight of those years to serve as Chancellor of the Archdiocese, during which time I worked closely with our archives and records program.

This morning I drove here from St. Louis, where I was attending the Sixteenth Congress of Medieval Canon Law. Coming from meeting with medieval historians to a conference of diocesan archivists served to provide me with a clear reminder that the records you preserve now as archivists may someday be researched by historians hundreds of years from now!

Most parents at some point or another find themselves frustrated by their children, who might be *hearing* everything that Mom or Dad is saying, but are not truly *listening* to their words. As is often said, the words seem to “go in one ear and out the other,” not bringing about the desired change in the child’s behavior. I remember, for example, my mother telling my younger siblings not to touch the hot frying pan or the tray of cookies that she had just taken out of the oven. Of course, that admonition raises a child’s curiosity, leading to the painful touching that will verify that Mom’s warning should have been heeded for good reason! It seems that Our Lord is referencing something similar at the end of His parable today: when He says, “Whoever has ears ought to hear.”

At this point in Matthew’s Gospel (Mt 13:1-9), Jesus has just accomplished the healing of the blind and mute demoniac, a miracle that has been met with a great deal of skepticism on the part of the scribes and pharisees, who question the source of His power. Jesus’ response to them is only to double down on His divine identity: “There is something greater than Solomon here.” He not only defends His being the Son of God, but turns the pharisees’ question back upon their own hearts: *Are you* bearing the “fruit that befits repentance”? *Are you* free from the influence of sin and

Satan? Whose Kingdom reigns in your heart? Bringing all of this to a crescendo, right before this parable of the sower, Jesus' mother and relatives find themselves unable to see Him because of the crowds, and Jesus responds that anyone and everyone "who does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, and sister, and mother." His is an extraordinarily generous offer: if you hear, *and listen*, and obey, your place is beside all the saints as members of the family of God!

This gift of family-relationship with God is the constant theme that Jesus keeps repeating: God is generous with His grace and love: He scatters it upon the least likely and the most far flung. Like the simple semitic sower, the Lord scatters His seed *before* He plows. He gives His word before checking what kind of heart is there to receive it. He invites us to bear tremendous fruit - 30, 60, 100-fold - but only then He steps back and lets us determine whether that fruit will be born. **God does not wait for us to be ready to bestow His Love upon us;** He flings it upon us with abandon, and then lets us freely choose what we do with it.

The great prophecy of Isaiah comes true: "For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there, but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the

eater, so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I intend, and prosper in the thing for which I sent it." [Isaiah 55:10-11]

I find it providential that these readings are given us today in the context of this gathering of diocesan archivists from all over our country. "Archives" and "Archivist" comes from the Latin word *archivum*, referring to the place where written records are kept, which itself is borrowed from the Greek word *arkheion*, a town hall or public building, where *ta arkheia*, the "public records" were kept for the *arkhē*, the government. An archive, at its heart, is a place where the most important documents and records are kept. It is a storehouse for history, for documentation, for all the bits and pieces that make up the story of our Church. It is a place to treasure and protect the most important, essential, and meaningful *words*.

The words that God places in the mouth of the prophet Jeremiah at the conclusion of today's first reading (Jeremiah 1:1, 4-10) consist of six verbs. Four are verbs of destruction—to root up and to tear down, to destroy and to demolish—and two are verbs of restoration: to build and to plant. This ratio is a good preview of the Book of Jeremiah itself, which contains more oracles of judgment than restoration. Jeremiah was called tear down the evil

structures of the world around him and to plant God's word in the minds and hearts of his hearers.

Jesus compares the word of God to a seed. Jesus, of course, is the Word of God. He is sowing himself in the hearts and souls of his hearers. Is not the Gospel, the words of Jesus, *His Story*, the most important words of all? Each of our hearts is an archive, a treasure-house for the words of the Lord. Let us strive to carry and care for, to protect and pass-on, those most important words of God's love that have been scattered upon each of our hearts, as expressed in my episcopal motto: *Lex cordis caritas – The law of the heart is love.*

May God give us this grace. Amen.