



Christian Education

A series of Sermons and Occasional Papers
From the clergy and members
of Holy Trinity Church
Forbes Park, Makati

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Title: **"Roots."**
Comment: Insert Comment here
Author: The Rev. Tyler A. Strand

Readings for this Sunday:

First Reading Deuteronomy 28: 1-6
Second Reading Revelation 14: 13-16
Gospel John 6: 37-40

From the Gospel according to Matthew:

"Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. But then the sun rose, they were scorched; and *since they had no depth of root*, they withered away. Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Let anyone with ears listen!"

In case you didn't know, we had a typhoon last week. For me it was, well, an...educational...experience. I learned that it is possible, if not pleasant, to live for five days without electricity, and I came to appreciate the disciplinary benefits of a cold shower in the morning. Others had it much, much worse. But perhaps the saddest thing for me was the loss of the big fruit trees all around the rectory.

Ah! The trees... It is heartrending to see so many destroyed, lying all over the streets like so many casualties in a terrible war. But you know it's strange: I didn't understand just why some trees went down and others didn't- until I looked a bit more carefully at them and discovered something strange: the trees that fell didn't

have particularly deep roots, especially here in the villages. They were large, but not secure. And many of those that fell seem to have been those that had been planted as adult trees, not grown in place. That helped to explain it: the homeowners wanted something quick, something that didn't require patience. They wanted it to look as though that landscaping had been done long before, but without the care and loving nurture that stable growth demands. And so these trees were big, but like the seeds in our Lord's parable, they had no firm roots, and so they fell in the typhoon- an example of our society and its need for immediate satisfaction, whatever the cost, whatever the result.

Today we celebrate two festivals connected with the harvest. In each case, there is a lot of imagination that goes into thinking that these occasions have anything to do with the growing and reaping of crops here in the Tropics: they definitely represent the phenomena of the northern hemispheres of Europe, North America and Northern Asia. However, it is not just corn and wheat and rice that is the basis of times of Thanksgiving- the Chinese Mid-Autumn Festival celebrates not only the harvest moon, but also the gathering of the family together to take time to enjoy both nature and their own company. For those of us from the urban North, Thanksgiving Day, whenever it is celebrated, is no longer directly connected to the farmers for whose labors we are supposed to give thanks. Often it too is a celebration of the family gathered around a festal dinner table, or whose absence miles away becomes the source of such longing nostalgia at this time of year.

This sense of the interconnectedness of the family allows us to appreciate our own roots- roots that can be as shallow or as deep as the trees in our gardens...or what's left of them!

Expats, those living for however long a time far from the places they call "home", have a bad reputation for being flighty, unconnected with the local people and culture, and not good candidates for lasting friendships. This is an overstatement, but it reveals a truth: it is hard to pretend to have roots if one hasn't really put them down. Those who can sense honesty and substance in a person can tell if he or she is just "passing through." And many expats do appear to have lost the sense of stability that comes with a settled community and expected, traditional roles. There are two things to suggest for this. The first is to keep in touch with family and friends

however one can: e-mail, for all its annoyances, is a blessing, and if used correctly can restore the lost art of letter writing. The other suggestion, though, is to get involved in the community around you: learn its customs, its languages, its way of looking at things. Recognize that it has been around a lot longer than you have, and will be there after you leave. It has roots, even if you don't.

Now, local families, and those who represent our local cultures have an important role to play: they are our examples of how roots work. Their customs, their family systems, their languages and foods not only give them stability, but they also help those without roots to "hang on" in difficult times. Expats often comment that the Filipino and Chinese family unity puts Western, diluted families to shame. And the Asian family also reminds us all about the interconnectedness of the generations. This doesn't necessarily demand ancestor "worship" in the religious sense, but it certainly does mean ancestor respect, honor and a sense that we are responsible for our actions and our standards not only to ourselves and our children, but to those who have gone before us- a controversial thought, perhaps, but one that I personally hold, and meant not to keep us prisoners of the past, but to give us roots to grow. And, of course, both long-term residents and those passing through can benefit from a church family to hold things together- particularly one that dependably preaches the Gospel, worships with dignity and beauty, and encourages personal spiritual growth.

And that brings me to perhaps the most important aspect of roots: our Faith. Here I am talking not just about "faith" in a general sense. There is far too much "spirituality" out there right now and not enough solid religion. Our Christian Faith, based on a personal experience of God as revealed in Jesus Christ, reminds us that we didn't just make this up, but rather are inheritors of a way of living both life and the life beyond according to a revelation by God of how things really are. That is the reason that I, for one, affirm the approach to Christianity that not only celebrates the daily rejuvenation by Holy Spirit, but also keeps faith with the brothers and sisters who have gone before us. Our leaves are green and fresh as we find new ways to express the timeless Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ both to ourselves and to the world, but unlike the transplanted trees that were lost in last week's storm- we have deep roots that will help us withstand the typhoons.

There is value to the Church in affirming continuity- the sense that the gathered family represents not only those of the current generation, but of those of generations past who, at least mystically, are sensed as being present. This is more specific to the ancient rites of the Chinese festival, but Thanksgiving hymns, too, give thanks for those who are absent or departed and expect our reunion after the final "Harvest Home". And perhaps the most beautiful expression of this in the prayer we recite at weddings that ties all of our church's families together: "Grant that the bonds of our common humanity, by which all your children are united one to another, and the living to the dead, may be so transformed by your grace, that your will may be done on earth as it is in heaven; where, O Father, with your Son and the Holy Spirit, you live and reign in perfect unity, now and for ever."