It was early evening on November 9, 1965, when a power station at Niagara Falls became overloaded with power demands. It was set to measure power output, and to transfer power to a backup system if the output rose too high. This system had been put in place two years earlier, but no one had thought to re-adjust the measurements to reflect the changes in power demands in those two years. At the first sign of a power overload, the station shut down and began transferring power to the backup generators. These, too, became overloaded and shut down, resulting in a massive blackout across most of the north-eastern United States and Canada. Airports, utilities, corporations, schools, hospitals, public transportation systems, and homes were without power for thirteen hours. Millions of people were affected. And all because someone had not thought to re-adjust the numbers on the main generator. [James Burke, *Connections* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1978)] — I see people every day who are overloaded and choked. We want to do everything so well. We want to provide for our families, excel in our work, make sure our children are able to participate in all kinds of extracurricular activities, and look after aging parents. The list suddenly becomes overwhelming, and religion, well it will just have to take its place in line. Jesus described us well when he said that “other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants.”

In the first reading, Isaiah consoles the Jewish slaves in Babylon, assuring them that, like rain and snow which water the earth so that seeds may sprout and grow, God’s word will accomplish its purpose, in this case by returning the exiles to their homes in peace as God promised. In the second reading, St. Paul reminds us that just as seeds must fall into the earth and die to produce abundant crop, the pain and sufferings God permits in our lives help our redemption. Paul wants us to wait for our eternal reward while we continue sowing the word of God diligently and suffering for the Lord, as he did.

Today’s Gospel teaches us that the word of the Lord is the seed, and our hearts and minds are the soil. The seed’s good spiritual yield in one’s life depends on how fully one willingly accepts and responds to the word of the Lord. The yield arising from the positive response will be abundant beyond all imagining. The parable tells us to do our part by preparing fertile soil in our hearts in which the word of God can germinate, grow, and yield 30-, 60, or 100-fold.
We need to assess our use of the word of God. We need to read the word of God every day, starting with a prayer to the Holy Spirit for the gifts of attentive reading and the ability and willingness to apply the message we receive to our daily living. When we listen to the word of God as read and preached in the Church during the Holy Mass, we need to pay full attention to the message given by God Who uses the priest as His instrument. We also need to ask God’s special grace to remove all types of blocks, like laziness, anxiety, worries, and the burden of unrepented sins, any of which can prevent the word of God from influencing and transforming our lives. When we receive Jesus, the Word of God and the Source of the word of God, in Holy Communion we need to ask him to transform our lives so that we may see Jesus in all of us (for we are all brothers and sisters in Him), and share with each of them Jesus’ unconditional love, mercy, compassion, and forgiveness.

We need to keep our spiritual soil fertile and prepared for the word of God. We need to keep our hearts open to the word of God instead of closing it with pride, prejudice, fear, or laziness. We have to remove from our hearts the weeds like evil habits and addictions, evil tendencies, hatred, jealousy, fear, and greed. We should not allow the trials and tribulations of this world, the cares of this world, our ambitions, or our desires for worldly success and happiness to choke out the messages that God gives through His word.