

# Tilling the Soil, Opening our Hearts

Into Your Hands | *Archbishop Robert Casey*

After a difficult winter and a late-arriving spring, we now tend to the ground that has remained fallow through cold days and months of patient waiting for sunlight. As we break ground in our fields and gardens, we soon discover that the demand to care for creation is not simply found externally in nature. This care must be given to our interior life as well. We must tend to the state of our heart, creating a healthy place for faith, hope, and love to be planted, nourished, and bear fruit.

Over time, untilled soil can become hardened and incapable of receiving water. Our hearts, too, can become hardened, thirsting for the Living Water that first gave us life in Baptism. Rocky soil, overtaken by obstacles and barriers, is a difficult environment for setting deep roots. Our hearts, as well, overwhelmed by attitudes and outlooks as stubborn as any boulder, face the challenge of setting roots deeply in the love and mercy of God. Thorny soil, beset by weeds that overtake it and choke off all light and life, does not permit healthy growth. Our hearts, also, find it hard to thrive when worries and distractions surround and overtake us.

As in our gardens, where we must break ground and till the soil, we also must break open our hearts to receive new grace, to be freed of any stubbornness or stumbling blocks in our way, and to cut back the weeds of anxiety and anguish that encroach upon our growth.

When we enter a church and bless ourselves with holy water, we renew our baptismal identity, softening our hardened hearts and giving welcome to fresh grace. When we receive Holy Communion, responding “Amen,” which is our “yes” to becoming part of the Body of Christ, we become strong

enough to confront any unwelcome barrier that might prevent us from truly living as one body, one spirit in Christ. When we exit a church and enter back into our daily life, we commit to walk tall in our faith and not allow worry, fear, or distraction to cast their shadow over us.

The Book of Hosea reminds us, “Sow for yourselves justice, reap the reward of loyalty; break up for yourselves a new field, for it is time to seek the Lord, till he comes and rains justice upon you” (Hos 10:12).

As Catholics, we see this work not as the effort of a single individual but as *communal* work. All hands must labor in the field to assist in the care of our Church’s growth and fruitfulness. I am reminded of my grandfather, a hard-working and faith-filled farmer. He never attempted to work alone. He invited those around him to assist in the care of his fields. Together they would break ground each spring. Together they would bring in the harvest each fall.

On Sundays, my grandfather would teach me about the grace and gift of Communion. The church we attended was a place of welcome; there were no strangers, only friends. The Mass would conclude with everyone gathering for donuts and coffee. I discovered that the Eucharist was not simply something I received at Mass but a call to divine encounters that would be experienced with family, friends, neighbors, and strangers beyond the Mass.

As we break bread with each other at the Lord’s table, we pray that our sharing in Holy Communion nourishes us and makes us strong, so that we might go forth from the altar ready and willing to break ground with one another. Breaking ground—breaking open our hardened hearts—will allow God’s grace to take root deep in our hearts, to grow stronger every day, and to bear fruit that can be shared with all those who hunger.

