Good morning and thank you for that lovely introduction! It is about 4:00am and I am joining you truly from a pre-dawn place! It is pleasure to be joining you this morning from the Hildegard Haus in NE Ohio on the shore of Lake Erie.

When I was invited to choose a Gospel for this prayer service, the parable of the seed sower immediately came to mind.

We often interpret this Gospel from the perspective that rich soil alone produces good grain – abundant fruit – and therefore soil must be ideal for a seed to root. While there are advantages to planting seeds in rich soil, nature has a way of adapting to less-than-ideal circumstances. Some of the most delectable and abundant fruit bursts forth from harsh, rocky soil. Seeds are resilient and will find a way to grow in unexpected places - cement paths, among the thorns, and where there is little room for roots to spread.

Many of the plants that we need for our very survival – for example, the pesky, resilient dandelion – find creative ways to spread seeds far and wide in all types of soil despite serious effort at times to eradicate them as weeds. Dandelions flourish because God knows we need them – the honeybee needs them. Not everyone has the eyes to see or the ears to hear their value.

Is this not what it feels like at times to be a lay person; LGBTQ+; or a woman in the Roman Catholic Church?

For many years seeds were germinating and growing in my own life – seeds I did not plant or did not expect to grow – some of which I even tried to eradicate. Yet, like a dandelion, these seeds found their way into the soil of my soul and began to grow in ways I could have never imagined.

Over the years I came to realize God is an eclectic, vibrant, verdant Gardener. Regardless of the condition of the soil or our willingness to nurture and nourish it; God wildly and joyfully continues to sow.

It seems most appropriate within this context to highlight an extraordinary female leader, St. Hildegard of Bingen, a 12th century Germany Benedictine and Doctor of the Church. Hildegard understood seeds – literally and figuratively – and has left us many beautiful parables and metaphorical stories around them. I have spent many years engaged in studying her work and developing creative ways to bring her charism to the wider community – most recently through the work of the Hildegard Haus.

The sanctuary wall behind me depicts the vision St. Hildegard had of the Fallen Stars (Scivias 3:1). It captures a grand image of God, the seed-sower of the entire universe.

St. Hildegard often used a theological concept VIRIDITAS – which she did not invent but she gave it deeper meaning. Translated from the Latin viriditas means “greening power” and she used this term to describe a holistic life source inherent in every particle of creation – physical, spiritual, and energetic.

The potential of a seed is realized through viriditas, so is the healing of a soul.

She used this image to explain the need to maintain a healthy balance in one’s life. When one part of our being is out of balance, the whole will suffer. Using the image of the Body of Christ given to us by St. Paul and incorporated into Vatican II – we know that when one part of the Body of Christ suffers, it effects the wellbeing of the entire body.

Maintaining a healthy balance is important for individuals as well as communities, institutions, and the Church. When our relationships with God, each other, and creation are healthy, we will be verdant and will bear fruit – when there is imbalance, dis-ease will grow. Our Church today is being overrun with dis-ease. It is in desperate need of healing. Its viriditas in many ways has been waning.

***And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and birds came and ate it up*.**

On the surface this line from the Gospel seems to indicate that this seed was wasted. But the seeds God sows are never wasted. Even the seed that becomes a meal for the birds will eventually be returned to the earth and may at that time find a space to grow. The seed falls to the path when we turn away from God. When we just are not ready yet to make a space for the seeds to be planted.

It took me over a decade to muster the courage to respond to my vocation to the priesthood. The seed of my call fell many times on a soilless path, but it was not wasted. Like the seed consumed by the bird, it eventually found its way to soil.

***Some fell on rocky ground… sprang up at once…*** ***and when the sun rose it was scorched, and it withered for lack of roots***. Roots are important. Without sufficient roots, there can be no branches. As we find ourselves in new spaces, new ministries, asking new questions, it is important that we stay connected to Jesus Christ, our root. If we scatter our seed in places that are too shallow, disconnected from our history, our beloved traditions, our communities, our efforts may produce in the short-term but will not be sustainable.

Jesus did not disconnect from his roots, but he did prune and remove what was inhibiting authentic growth. Many of the conversations during this Synod this week have been focused on what needs to be pruned.

Discernment allows us to look at the health of our root system – personally and collectively. If the soil is too shallow and we are not growing or producing, we too will begin to wither.

***Some seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it.*** This is an image that I have experienced in a personal way over the past two years. When I made the decision to follow my call to ordained ministry, it created an intense experience of grief. As a cradle-Catholic, I received sacraments, education, ministerial training within the same diocese for almost fifty years. I had set down deep roots and many relationships had formed. As I struggled to find a way to respond to my call, it became obvious - deep roots do not pull up easily.

I imagine many of you gathered for this Synod can relate to this image. As I began to wiggle myself loose from my position in the parish, volunteer activities, and teaching roles, it felt as though my roots were had become tangled around everything in their path.

Over the years, I produced much fruit as a diocesan certified lay ecclesial minister, but the seed of my vocation had been sown among thorns. The bramble I was caught in – a Church which does not recognize my vocation – was choking it out.

***But some seed fell on rich soil, and produced fruit, a hundred or sixty or thirtyfold.***The extraordinary line up of speakers and panelists for this Synod are providing much needed fertilizer to renew the depleted soil of the Church. With the “ears to hear” it becomes clear that the words ringing forth from this Synod are prophetic. They are the words of Good News – they embody the Gospel in action.

In her vita – her life story, St. Hildegard of Bingen wrote:

*Finally, at a later time I saw a mystical and wondrous vision. All my innards were affected, and my bodily sensation was suspended, for my knowledge took on a new form, as if I did not know myself. By the inspiration of God, something like drops of gentle rain were sprinkled onto the knowledge of my soul.”*

During these past days of this Synod, the inspiration of God has been raining down upon us like “drops of gentle rain sprinkling knowledge into our souls.” We pray that the seeds being sown deep within our innards open our minds and hearts during and following this Synod and that they produce a new image of the Church where women and men from all walks of life can peacefully and joyfully exist within the same glorious garden.

We are the Body of Christ.

We are the Church of God.

May we go forth and together produce sweet, delectable, and abundant fruit.

Amen

The Parable of the Sower

A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Matthew:

On that day, Jesus went out of the house and sat down by the sea.

Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat down, and the whole crowd stood along the shore.

And he spoke to them at length in parables saying: “A sower went out to sow.

And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and birds came and ate it up.

Some fell on rocky ground, where it had little soil. It sprang up at once because the soil was not deep,

and when the sun rose it was scorched, and it withered for lack of roots.

Some seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it.

But some seed fell on rich soil, and produced fruit, a hundred or sixty or thirtyfold.

Whoever has ears ought to hear.”

This is the Good News of Salvation

Glory and praise to you Jesus Christ