

Scripture Study

Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time – Cycle B



Opening prayer

Ezekiel 17:22-24

(Ps 92:2-3, 13-16)

2 Corinthians 5:6-10

Mark 4:26-34

Overview of the Gospel:

- This Sunday marks our return to the liturgical season of Ordinary Time where we will mostly be hearing the Gospel Reading each Sunday from the Gospel of Mark.
- In today's Gospel, we find Jesus early on in his ministry. He is in Galilee in his adopted town of Capernaum (Mark 2:1) where he has been selecting his disciples, healing the sick and teaching.
- As he teaches by the sea (Mark 4:1), he begins to instruct them using parables. A parable is a wise saying or fictitious story used by Jesus to set forth his teachings. He uses them to both *conceal* his message from the faithless who will only react to it with hostility and violence, and to *reveal* his message to those who believe and embrace that message (Mark 4:33-34).
- The parables we hear in this Sunday's Gospel come at the end of this discourse and contain Jesus' teachings about the Kingdom of God. Verses 26-29 is an agricultural parable found only Mark. Jesus compares the mystery of natural, organic growth to the expansion of the Kingdom which will visibly mature like grain, but the spiritual forces behind it will remain invisible.
- The parable of the mustard seed (verses 30-32) is based on the difference between the smallest seed and the greatest shrub and depicts how Christ's Kingdom begins with a small band of disciples and gradually grows into a worldwide Church.

Questions:

- In the 1st Reading, what similarities can you see between this reading and the parable of the mustard seed? What differences can you see (verse 24) and what do you think it means?
- In the 2nd Reading, St. Paul says his highest desire is to be with the Lord in heaven (verse 8). How great is your love of your earthly life, and how great is your desire to be with the Lord in heaven? Which of these two loves is greater? Whom do you aim to please with the way you live your life?
- In the Gospel reading, verses 26-29, what part (if any) do people play in the growing Kingdom? How does this parable complement the one in Mark 4:3-20?
- In verses 30-32, what does the contrasting seed and bush teach about the Kingdom?
- Does knowing that the growth of the Kingdom is ultimately in God's hands cause you to rest or to work more? Why?
- At what stage is the Kingdom in your life now: Still a seed? Sprouting? Outgrowing the weeds? Producing a harvest?

Catechism of the Catholic Church: §§ 543, 546, 764

Closing prayer

In order to pray, let us believe; and for our faith not to weaken, let us pray. Faith causes prayer to grow, and when prayer grows our faith is strengthened. –St. Augustine

Remember to read and meditate on the daily Mass readings!

"With what can we compare the kingdom of God?"

Scripture: *Mark 4:26-34*

And he said, "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed upon the ground, and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he knows not how. The earth produces of itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come."

And he said, "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade." With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; he did not speak to them without a parable, but privately to his own disciples he explained everything.

Meditation: Farmers spare no effort to prepare the ground for the sowing; but once the grain is sown there is nothing more they can do until the harvest; the grain develops by itself. Our Lord uses this comparison to describe the inner strength that causes the Kingdom of God on earth to grow up to the day of harvest (cf. Joel 3:13 and Revelation 14:15), that is, the day of the Last Judgment. Jesus is telling His disciples about the Church: the preaching of the Gospel, the generously sown seed, will



unfailingly yield its fruit, independently of who sows or who reaps: it is God who gives the growth (cf. 1 Corinthians 3:5-9). It will all happen "he knows not how", without men being fully aware of it. The Kingdom of God also refers to the action of grace in each soul: God silently works a transformation in us, whether we sleep or watch, causing resolutions to take shape in our soul--resolutions to be faithful, to surrender ourselves, to respond to grace--until we reach "mature manhood" (cf. Ephesians 4:13). Even though it is necessary for man to make this effort, the real initiative lies with God, "because it is the Holy Spirit who, with His inspirations, gives a supernatural tone to our thoughts, desires and actions. It is He who leads us to receive Christ's teaching and to assimilate it in a profound way. It is He who gives us the light by which we perceive our personal calling and the strength to carry out all that God expects of us. If we are docile to the Holy Spirit, the image of Christ will be found more and more fully in us, and we will be brought closer every day to God the Father. 'For whoever are led by the Spirit of God, they are the children of God' (Romans 8:14)" (St. J.

Escriva, "Christ Is Passing By", 135).

What can mustard seeds teach us about the kingdom of God? The tiny mustard seed literally grew to be a tree which attracted numerous birds because they loved the little black mustard seed it produced. God's kingdom works in a similar fashion. It starts from the smallest beginnings in the hearts of men and women who are receptive to God's word. And it works unseen and causes a transformation from within. Just as a seed has no power to change itself until it is planted in the ground, so we cannot change our lives to be like God until God gives us the power of his Holy Spirit. The Lord of the Universe is ever ready to transform us by the power of his Spirit. Are you ready to let God change you by his grace and power? The kingdom of God produces a transformation in those who receive the new life which Jesus Christ offers. When we yield to Jesus Christ, our lives are transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit who dwells in us. Paul the Apostle says, "*we have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us*" (2 Corinthians 4:7). Do you believe in the transforming power of the Holy Spirit?

"Lord Jesus, fill me with your Holy Spirit and transform me into the Christ-like holiness you desire. Increase my zeal for your kingdom and instill in me a holy desire to live for your greater glory."