

Cycle B 11th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reading 1 Ez 17:22-24

Thus says the Lord GOD: I, too, will take from the crest of the cedar, from its topmost branches tear off a tender shoot, and plant it on a high and lofty mountain; on the mountain heights of Israel I will plant it. It shall put forth branches and bear fruit and become a majestic cedar. Birds of every kind shall dwell beneath it, every winged thing in the shade of its boughs. And all the trees of the field shall know that I, the LORD, bring low the high tree, lift high the lowly tree, wither up the green tree, and make the withered tree bloom. As I, the LORD, have spoken, so will I do.

Responsorial Psalm Ps 92:2-3, 13-14, 15-16

R. (cf. 2a) Lord, it is good to give thanks to you.

It is good to give thanks to the LORD, to sing praise to your name, Most High, To proclaim your kindness at dawn and your faithfulness throughout the night.

R. Lord, it is good to give thanks to you.

The just one shall flourish like the palm tree, like a cedar of Lebanon shall he grow. They that are planted in the house of the LORD shall flourish in the courts of our God.

R. Lord, it is good to give thanks to you.

They shall bear fruit even in old age; vigorous and sturdy shall they be, Declaring how just is the LORD, my rock, in whom there is no wrong.

R. Lord, it is good to give thanks to you.

Reading 2 2 Cor 5:6-10

Brothers and sisters: We are always courageous, although we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight. Yet we are courageous, and we would rather leave the body and go home to the Lord. Therefore, we aspire to please him, whether we are at home or away. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may receive recompense, according to what he did in the body, whether good or evil.

Gospel Mk 4:26-34

Jesus said to the crowds: "This is how it is with the kingdom of God; it is as if a man were to scatter seed on the land and would sleep and rise night and day and through it all the seed would sprout and grow, he knows not how. Of its own accord the land yields fruit, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. And when the grain is ripe, he wields the sickle at once, for the harvest has come."

He said, "To what shall we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable can we use for it? It is like a mustard seed that, when it is sown in the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on the earth. But once it is sown, it springs up and becomes the largest of plants and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the sky can dwell in its shade." With many such parables he spoke the word to them as they were able to understand it. Without parables he did not speak to them, but to his own disciples he explained everything in private.

The readings today depend upon images of nature to make their point. They prompted me to think about my Dad who had a green thumb. He had a gift for growing all kinds of plants, indoors and out. Some of my earliest memories are of being in a garden helping him. So today join me in saying Happy Father's Day to all you fathers, and you men who are father figures in people's lives. God Bless You!

Today's first parable in the Gospel tells us that a farmer scatters seeds on the land and then waits. His ordinary life continues. He would "...*sleep and rise, night and day, and through it all the seed would sprout and grow, he knows not how. Of its own accord, the land yields fruit...*" The farmer worked hard, but then he waited for the mysterious process to take place.

When we hear today's Gospel parables, as always there is a "catch"...and, it is not obvious. If we think it is obvious and clear, then we are probably missing the point. Jesus' parables are meant to challenge our way of thinking about the world and God's desire for this world.

In this parable Jesus compares the everyday miracle of plants growing to the kingdom of God. Try as we may, the kingdom is in God's hands. Perhaps we can help by nurturing the faith that was planted in us, but it is God who does the work. Someday, God willing, we will see the harvest of the heavenly kingdom. For Christians, God's work has been our salvation through Jesus, and because it is planted in us at Baptism, we can trust that God...as we heard in the First reading...will accomplish it! This should give us great hope!

In the Gospel's 2nd parable, the tiny mustard seed (about the size of a pinhead) grows to be a great shrub or even a tree, one that is taller than a man's head! The white mustard species is well known in Israel to grow to ten or twelve feet high with a stem the size of a man's arm! Well how does this apply to the kingdom of God? You see we are small. The movements of the Holy Spirit in us can be so modest as to be nearly disregarded. Yet if we are patient, if we watch for growth within us, the Spirit gradually will surge up and will let us together yield much fruit. Jesus is saying that the kingdom starts out small like a mustard seed planted in each of us and grows and grows. Jesus also knew something not so obvious about mustard bushes....they are like weeds. Once they grow and drop their seeds, it is almost impossible to get rid of them. In

other words, nothing will be able to eliminate the kingdom once it has been planted....because Jesus Christ is the one who planted it!

Let me share a final thought about the why the kingdom of God is so very important to us. No doubt the recent and sad public deaths of Kate Spade and Anthony Bourdain have shocked each and every one of us. It all seems so raw. I am hopeful that Kate and Anthony...not as celebrities, but as human beings...people first, as daughter, as son, as mother, as father...let them be the recognizable faces of the countless known and unknown faces of the all people who have taken their own lives...let them and their families all be embraced by God's love that flows through His kingdom. We may think that we are far removed from these tragedies, but did you know that last year 25 families in Forsyth County lived through the horror of losing a loved one to suicide? 30 years ago my wife was driving out of our subdivision taking our son and his friend to a soccer game. She heard a blood curdling scream. When she jumped out of car and ran up the driveway she found a woman who just discovered her mother in the garage, dead from carbon monoxide. My wife called 911 and stayed to console the woman while they waited for police. You see this is how God's love and mercy flows in the Kingdom of God. We can help. The human and divine love of Jesus calls us to be better listeners, more aware of people's emotions, more aware of the signals they might be sending. We must listen to people, looking in their eyes...as Jesus looked into the eyes of those broken souls who came to him. I sense that people are less heard today than ever before...we've placed so many things between us...various distractions...we all do it...to ourselves and to others.

There remains a brutal stigma with mental illness and suicide. But know that effective professional help is available...and never doubt that God's help is there as well! Try as we may, the kingdom is in God's hands. All of us need to embrace with faith and hope the words said in our Catechism 2283 *"We should not despair of the eternal salvation of persons who have taken their own lives. By ways known to him alone, God can provide the opportunity for salutary repentance. The Church prays for persons who have taken their own lives."*

We walk by faith, so we believe that God is both just and merciful, let us place their burdens, though mostly unknown to us, and our burdens, under the tender care and warmth of God's loving miracle. It is in His kingdom that we experience an ever-growing goodness and grace!!

And if you want give you Dad the very BEST present today, please, tell your father, that you love him and that you are praying for him. That was the last thing I said to mine.

[As people were leaving Mass, someone came up to me saying, "Thank You, my family was one of those last year."]