



LIVING THE GOSPEL

**11th Sunday in Ordinary Time
June 16, 2024**

Theme: "The kingdom of God,..is like a grain of mustard seed."

Gathering Prayer

All: O God, strength of those who hope in you, graciously hear our pleas, and, since without you mortal frailty can do nothing, grant us always the help of your grace, that in following your commands we may please you by our resolve and our deeds. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Exploring the Word

Gospel Reading: Mark 4:26-34

²⁶ And he said, "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed upon the ground,
²⁷ and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he knows not how. ²⁸ The earth produces of itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. ²⁹ But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come."

³⁰ And he said, "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it? ³¹ It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; ³² 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." ³³ with many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; ³⁴ he did not speak to them without a parable, but privately to his own disciples he explained everything.

Gospel Focus

Jesus often uses farming metaphors in his parables. The imagery is strong: seeds are mysterious little things. They are often small and easy to overlook; if we did not know what they were, we would assume they were of little value. They are not living things on their own. However, in the right conditions they grow into so much more. They blossom forth with life, providing food and shade and homes for wildlife. Those who grow plants from seed can only do so much. They can provide the right conditions with water and light. However, in the end the growth is not up to them. In much the same way, God calls us to partnership. We have a role to play in bringing about God's kingdom. However, in the end it is not really up to us; it is God who does the work.

Gospel Reflection

In today's gospel, Jesus tells a parable that uses the image of sowing a tiny seed to speak about the way radical change begins. Mustard seed is barely visible, and at first may escape notice when it settles into the soil. When it sprouts, however, it shoots up into a large, vigorous plant that spreads uncontrollably. It cannot be contained in defined plots but crosses over into fields where it is unwanted. And once it takes root, it is nearly impossible to eradicate. In Jesus' parable this weed that was the bane of many farmers' existence did not get into the field accidentally; it is deliberately sown.

In Mark's gospel, the mustard seed parable is coupled with another parable that describes the way in which the reign of God comes about over time, seemingly imperceptibly. Once the seeds of God's reign are sown, the one who scatters them goes about his daily work, sleeping and rising, night and day, while the seeds germinate and poke forth their first sprouts. The seeds keep growing and developing until the propitious moment arrives to take action for reaping the full harvest.

God's reign does not combine with military might, nor is it brought from the exterior or imposed on a subjugated people. Rather, it comes through the ordinary, everyday actions of seemingly insignificant people, whose seeds of faith and passion for justice have the power to make hope blossoms forth for a transformed world. To plant such seeds takes the kind of courage that Paul urges upon the Corinthians in today's second reading. He speaks of courage to "walk by faith not by sight," for those who sow the seeds of God's reign do not at the time see the end result.

Sowing tiny seeds of hope has unforeseen effects that go far and wide. At the end of the mustard seed parable, Jesus says that all the birds of the sky will dwell in the shade of the mustard plant's large branches. The image is the same as in the first reading, where Ezekiel speaks of the hoped-for messianic time when all nations would be drawn to Israel. They would be like birds of all varieties flocking to the sheltering boughs of the cedar tree. These readings give us courage that no action is too small for sowing God's reign. They bolster our hope that faithful, everyday choices to scatter the seeds of Christ's love unleashes a power that can transform the world.

Old/New Testament and CCC links

First Reading — Ezekiel 17:22-24

²²Thus says the Lord GOD: "I myself will take a sprig from the lofty top of the cedar, and will set it out; I will break off from the topmost of its young twigs a tender one, and I myself will plant it upon a high and lofty mountain; ²³ on the mountain height of Israel will I plant it, that it may bring forth boughs and bear fruit, and become a noble cedar; and under it will dwell all kinds of beasts; in the shade of its branches birds of every sort will nest.

²⁴ And all the trees of the field shall know that I the LORD bring low the high tree, and make high the low tree, dry up the green tree, and make the dry tree flourish. I the LORD have spoken, and I will do it."

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

R: 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)**

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)**

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)**

Second Reading — 2 Corinthians 5:6-10

⁶ So we are always of good courage; we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, ⁷ for we walk by faith, not by sight. ⁸ We are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. ⁹ So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. ¹⁰ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive good or evil, according to what he has done in the body.

Catechism of The Catholic Church

543. *Everyone* is called to enter the kingdom. First announced to the children of Israel, this messianic kingdom is intended to accept men of all nations.(Cf. Mt 8:11 10:5-7; 28:19) To enter it, one must first accept Jesus' word:

The word of the Lord is compared to a seed which is sown in a field; those who hear it with faith and are numbered among the little flock of Christ have truly received the kingdom. Then, by its own power, the seed sprouts and grows until the harvest.(LC 5; cf. Mk 4:14, 26-29; Lk 12:32)

546. Jesus' invitation to enter his kingdom comes in the form of *parables*, a characteristic feature of his teaching.(Cf. Mk 4:33-34) Through his parables he invites people to the feast of the kingdom, but he also asks for a radical choice: to gain the kingdom, one must give everything.(Cf. Mt 13:44-45; 22:1-14) Words are not enough, deeds are required.(Cf. Mt 21:28-32) The parables are like mirrors for man: will he be hard soil or good earth for the word?(Cf. Mt 13:3-9) What use has he made of the talents he has received?(Cf. Mt 25:14-30) Jesus and the presence of the kingdom in this world are secretly at the heart of the parables. One must enter the kingdom, that is, become a disciple of Christ, in order to "know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven".(Mt 13:11) For those who stay "outside", everything remains enigmatic.(Mk 4:11; cf. Mt 13:10-15)

Sharing and Discussion

1. Name a "seed" in your life, something that seemed small but grew in ways you did not expect?
2. Waiting for plants to blossom is slow work, where do you struggle to have patience with God?
3. What aspect of being a Christian, takes the most courage to live publicly and "out loud"? What gives you that courage?

Closing Prayer

All: God of abundance, you make yourself known in the gifts of creation. Hear our prayers that we might be good stewards of the gifts you give us as individuals and as communities. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Leader: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life.

All: Amen