

11th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Jesus proclaimed the nearness of God's kingdom. Almost unnoticed, the kingdom is present among us, growing and accomplishing God's will. We gather today to give thanks for the presence and love of God at work in our world.

We are intent on pleasing God, St Paul tells us in the second reading. We come to Mass, conscious of our own shortcomings, as well as of God's mercy and compassion.

Ezekiel 17:22-24

The Lord has spoken – God will carry out God's word.

2 Corinthians 5:6-10

We walk by faith and not by sight.

Mark 4:26-34

This is what God's kingdom is like – and how it grows.



SOWING A MUSTARD SEED

Reflection

**"With many such parables
he spoke the word to them as they were able to understand it".**

Jesus taught his followers by means of parables, stories that illustrated Christian truths using examples from everyday life. The images of farmers, grain, seeds and plants invited Jesus' followers to discover the nature of God's reign. Although a farmer did his work in planting the seed, it grew according to its own timetable. Jesus compared the irrepressible nature of the kingdom to a mustard seed that is small when it is sown, but which grew to the height of a tree when the plant matured. So too the kingdom moves steadily forward toward its fulfilment. Jesus' disciples were greatly encouraged; their own inadequacies would not hinder the coming of the reign of God, which would grow imperceptibly until fully established at the final judgment.



This Sunday's Gospel is about the Kingdom of God.

Jesus tells two parables,
one about the seed that grows and is harvested,
the other about the grain of mustard seed.

The Gospel closes with an comment about how Jesus uses parables.

What, I think, strikes us immediately in these parables is the concept of **growth**. It's an almost mysterious growth.

In the first parable the seed grows while the man who sowed it is asleep; he doesn't even know **how** it grows.

In the second, it is the tiny mustard seed that grows into a large shrub capable of sheltering the birds of the air.

When Mark came to write his Gospel (over thirty years after the resurrection) he was keenly aware of the humble origins of Christianity; he knew about how it had spread rapidly throughout the Mediterranean world. There's no doubt that what he wanted to do was to underline that tremendous spread: that's why he put these two stories of Jesus in together.

But he was also convinced that this growth wasn't the work of people. No! It could only be adequately explained by the Spirit of God working in the world. It is true that apostles, evangelists, and prophets **announced** the Kingdom to all the different communities. But since Mark would have been aware of Paul's theology about the charisms of the Spirit, he wouldn't have had any hesitation in seeing **God** at work in this extraordinary phenomenon.

People who study these things and have analysed them in modern times say that the purpose Jesus had in telling these parables, was, above all, to highlight, not so much the growth, but to stress **the end result**, the **harvesting** of the grain and the **sheltering** of the birds of the air.

In other words, Jesus, had a unique consciousness of himself as the final breakthrough of God's saving power in the world and therefore he would have focused on the significance of that breakthrough. Through him God's kingdom, or reign, was inaugurated. It could **not but** achieve its goal.

In this, we find the principle for the tension that exists in all the New Testament writings. It is between what God has **already done** in Jesus Christ and what **still remains to be done** in humankind. It is the tension between faith in **salvation achieved** and hope in **salvation yet to be achieved**.

We certainly need a theology of hope today perhaps more than at any time in our history. When nuclear bombs, injustice, racism, inflation, persecution and poverty seem about to overwhelm us, we need a conviction about the God of the future, the God whose reign of peace and justice will finally be established.

But that hope is barren without **faith**; faith in a God who has made a promise and has already fulfilled it, in an anticipated manner, in Jesus Christ (cf. 2 Cor 1:19-20). In fact, it is that **anticipated fulfilment** which makes our hope all the more intense.

So there we are: Sunday's Gospel confirms our hope. The Kingdom of God **is** in our midst. It **is** growing, even though we don't know how. And Jesus Christ, who first uttered the parables, is himself our assurance.

At the same time, this is not a Gospel of complacency. Mark would have been the last one to claim that we need to do nothing. He was writing for Christians who were giving their lives for the "good news" of salvation for everyone.

For people like these the parables are a reminder that, in the face of apparently total human inadequacy, **God's Kingdom is at work**.



WORDSEARCH

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P	R	A	E	D	O	C	E	L	V	GROWING	
G	D	A	S	U	R	P	B	T	R	EAR	
O	R	E	T	A	G	I	O	E	A	GRAIN	
R	A	I	E	S	R	R	B	R	H	CROP	
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G	R	A	T	S	U	M	T	S	E	MUSTARD	

FIRST DAY OF SUMMER



The summer solstice (on June 20th or 21st) marks the first day of the season of summer. In this northern hemisphere, it is the longest day of the year, when the Sun is farthest north.