

## Homily for June 13, 11th Sunday Ordinary Time, Year B

Our Sunday readings resume an “ordered” manner through The Gospel According to Mark. When last read, before Lent began, it was the Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time. We finished reading Chapter One with Our Lord healing a leper. Today is the Eleventh Sunday, two and one-half chapters later. This would be a good time to read Chapters Two, Three, and Four, in order to get a sense of where we are in our Journey through Mark.

==\_==\_==\_==

We hear two parables about the Kingdom which were told by Christ to crowds who came to hear him. He had just explained to His closest disciples why He teaches by using parables, and the explanation seems as mysterious as the parables. He tells them that those who accept the light of His teachings, even if they do not understand fully, will be given understanding later, and also an increase of enlightenment.

We are members of Christ’s Body. But in our own lives we are always walking in that place of being sometimes part of the confused crowds who need Jesus’ stories, and sometimes in His inner circle of Disciples who have had the meaning of His teachings become clearer and clearer with time.

==\_==\_==\_==

Today I am going to center on the first parable. Someone is sowing seed. The seed sprouts and grows, without the man’s understanding.

We scientifically know more than farmers did two thousand years ago, as we have the accumulated knowledge of their experiences and many more generations. Yet our personal experience is the same as theirs. And as for my own knowledge, though I have access to a lot more biological descriptions of what happens to flowers and trees and fruits and grain growing, I know less than a farmer back in Jesus’ day. All I know is seed, dirt, water, sun.

We still plant crops and do everything we can to help the growth. But we are not in charge. The harvest is whatever it will be.

Jesus says that this is what the Kingdom of God is like.

I've heard these sayings so often I have to stop at this point and remind myself of the newness of Christ's words.

A kingdom is a nation. A kingdom is a people, which is held together and expanded by rule and force and armies. The Hebrew people had a memory of being a kingdom. And they had a memory of being oppressed by more powerful kingdoms. Jesus walked the earth at a time when they were subjects of the Roman Empire. They were an occupied people.

Kingdoms used imagery like what is found in our First Reading today – they likened themselves to mighty trees, not grain or bushes. God is all-powerful. So, to speak of God's Kingdom should be about majesty and glory and earthquakes.

And Jesus speaks of the Kingdom in terms of everyday, unexceptional events. He reminds His listeners that God moves in mysterious ways. God touches hearts and gives words to prophets and works in locusts and manna and water coming from a rock.

==\_==\_==\_==

The sower in the parable does his part. It is an important part. If he wants a harvest, he doesn't gather from wild plants in the woods. He has work to do.

But the growth of the plants is beyond the control of the farmer. Even if he is able to control some parts of the process, such as the quality of the seed, or putting fertilizer on the soil, or irrigating the field. Even then, much of it is out of his hands. A large part of the results belongs to the plant. And it ALL belongs to the One Who made both the sower and the seed. The harvest takes place in ways beyond the abilities of the gardener.

And that, we are told by the Lord, is how the Kingdom of God works.

==\_==\_==\_==

At this point the question is which direction to go in our reflection. Does one use a few examples of taking care of the environment and talking care of the vulnerable as examples of the evangelization? Or does one use the Kingdom's growth - in the hearts of believers and the number of believers - as the basis for loving others and being good stewards of the world?

The mystery of our faith is that God wants us to understand that all of these are to be our goals. God's Kingdom encompasses our entire person, and so our entire interactions in life.

We are to go about our business. And Christ has told us what our business is. We are to share the gospel baptize the nations, love our neighbor as ourselves, turn the other cheek, forgive, feed the hungry, be humble, and love as He loves us. And more.

If we do all that – we are doing our job. But if we do it, and do it well, we can grow impatient. We can start thinking everyone has to respond on our timetable. We can be tempted to pride when things go as planned, or despair when they don't.

To that we still need to remember the parable. The Kingdom is like the seed. We do our part, But God gets credit, and it is according to God's plan. God will make it work though we don't know how.

==\_==\_==\_==\_==

So, we do our part to keep the environment safe for future generations. So, we do our part to respect others and respect life. As the Holy Father has been saying for years, we are to make the connection for others that an environmental language of ecosystems can be consistently used to speak of the human person and the personal and sexual relationships of men and women and the dignity of human life.

It is easy to feel discouraged in the midst of defending life and battling injustice and seeking peace when we don't see the results. Even after decades.

At such times it is good to also look at Today's First Reading from Ezekiel. The Passage refers to a prophecy earlier in the same chapter. Babylon is depicted as an eagle that tears out the top of the Cedar of Israel (in other words, the leaders) and exiles them in a foreign land. And now God will also take from a cedar and plant it in Zion (Jerusalem), where birds of all kinds (in other words, all nations) will come. The same image as our Lord's second parable today.

The people of Israel even when oppressed did what they could do, not seeing how anything could come from it – But God made it come about.

Churches can have great Masses, moving preaching, inspirational teachers and amazing retreats see no growth or changes of heart visibly. But God still works during that time, though we do not know how.

There is the perennial example of Saint Monica. She prayed for decades for the conversion of her husband and sons. And they were converted. One of them, her son Augustine, still teaches us through his writings sixteen hundred years later.

God takes what little seed we scatter, and produces a great harvest. If it can happen to my heart and mind, it can happen to the world.

That is the way it is with the Kingdom of God.