

Gratitude Foundation



*“Were not ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?
Has only this foreigner returned to give thanks to God?”*

(Lk. 17:15-17)

The Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time—Year B

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“In all things give thanks, it is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus”

(1 Thess: 5:18)

Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reading

Ezekiel 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

Psalm 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 Corinthians 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.

Alleluia

R. **Alleluia, alleluia.**

The seed is the word of God, Christ is the sower.
All who come to him will live forever.

R. **Alleluia, alleluia.**

Gospel

Mark 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.

Exegesis

Ezekiel 17:22-24

Our pericope from the Prophet Ezekiel consists of the last three verses of Chapter 17. It concludes a series of allegories that begin in verses 1-10. It is a story of two eagles. The first eagle is Nebuchadrezzar, king of Babylon and the second great eagle represents Psammetichus II, king of Egypt. The first eagle carries off the topmost twig, Jehoichin, taken off into Babylon into exile in 598 BCE. The vine planted by Nebuchadrezzar turns toward the second great eagle, the king of Egypt for assistance.

Verses 11-21 explain the riddle of the two eagles in historical detail and God bemoans the infidelity and the destruction of Israel. Verse 22 begins the promise of God to restore Israel. The allegory picks up from verse 10 and God says, "I, too, will take from the crest of the Cedar..." This twig represents the future king from the house of David. (See 2 Sam 7:13) The expression *birds of every kind* in verse 23 was first used in scripture in the story of Noa and the flood to describe all of the bird species on the Ark. It would thus seem to represent the people of the earth as saved by God. The majestic cedar represents the king of Judah. The trees of the field represent the surrounding kings. It is God who lifts high the lowly tree, the king of Judah, once brought low in Babylon. It is God who brings low the high tree, the king of Babylon. This is the story of the hand of God restoring Israel again, the second great paradigm of salvation history.

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

Psalm 92 is titled *A Hymn of Thanksgiving for God's Fidelity, A Sabbath Song*. The song contrasts the joy and gratitude of those who are faithful to Yahweh with the plight of evildoers. The evildoers are not included in the selected verses for the liturgy. They are doomed to eternal destruction. The psalmist, representing the faithful of Israel, is overwhelmed with gratitude for the love, faithfulness, and steadfastness of God. The image of God as Rock represents the steadfast love of God and God's immutability. The image of the cedar tree of Lebanon echoes the promise of God in our first reading from Ez. 17-22. It is God who plants, nourishes, protects and exalts the cedar tree. And for that the psalmist is filled with gratitude.

2 Corinthians 5:6-10

In verse 1 of Chapter 5 St. Paul states, "For we know that if our earthly dwelling, a tent, should be destroyed we have a building from God, a dwelling not made with hands, eternal in heaven." Paul uses the same language as Jesus captured by Mark (Mk 14:58) when He talked about destroying the temple referring to His body and raising a new dwelling not made with hands, i.e. His risen body. A tent is made by human hands and by its very nature is a temporary transient dwelling. Whereas an eternal dwelling in heaven is by its very nature permanent.

Given the introductory verses our pericope supports the in-between, in process, evolving theme of the Kingdom of God not yet fulfilled. In this body, in the corporeal realm we are not able to experience the fullness of the promise of eternal life. What we do while at home in the body has consequences that matter relative to the promise of eternal life. To walk by faith means to follow and walk with Christ in the here and now. It means to courageously remain faithful and to persevere until the end.

Exegesis (Continued)

Mark 4:26-34

Jesus spoke of the Kingdom of God both as at hand, in the here and now, in process and as already fulfilled and prepared for us. The two parables on the Kingdom of God in our passage today speak of the kingdom here on earth that is still in process. These two kingdom parables are the only kingdom parables in Mark's gospel.

In both parables there is a working partnership between God and humanity. In the first parable a man "scatters seed upon the earth." This is a little shocking in that it was customary to meticulously sow seeds and not carelessly "scatter them." Seeds were a lot of work to harvest and store for future planting. Food was scarce and precious. It would be prudent to sow them carefully in good soil that would provide the highest yield. Despite that the mystery of God, the mysterious and miraculous forces of life take over and the seed germinates in the darkness of the earth, sprouts through the surface and new life emerges. God continues to create new life; creation is an ongoing reality in the eyes of the ancient world. Human beings harvest and prepare the seeds, they prepare the soil, they sow the seeds, pull the weeds, and protect the crops from birds and scavengers. God provides the hidden mystery of life, sends the rains and provides the sunshine and the harvest matures and bears fruit. Then man steps in and harvests the crops and reaps the fruits of his labors and God's graces. In terms of the kingdom of God at hand, in the here and now, we are part of God's plan, an integral part of God's plan.

Now consider the mustard seed, the tiniest of seeds. When sown in the ground it becomes the largest of plants that can grow upwards of six feet tall. Each plant produces thousands of tiny seeds for future generation. Think of the power of life contained in that one tiny seed. It is testimony to the power of God. The mustard plant was known for its ability to germinate rapidly and take over a garden if not controlled.

"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." Jesus uses this imagery from the Word of God through the Prophet Ezekiel (our first reading this weekend) where God takes a sprig from the great cedar, and He plants it in Jerusalem and "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." In the first reading God is restoring Israel after the Babylonian Exile. "If so, then the reign of God proclaimed by Jesus is, like the renewal of Israel, the place where living creatures find refuge."¹ Like the Exodus event, the restoration of Israel after the Exile by the power of God, is a paradigm for salvation. Therefore, these parables remind us that we are a part of God's plan of salvation and the mysterious power of God is working with us.

1. John R. Donahue, S.J., Daniel J. Harrington, S.J., Sacra Pagina Series, The Gospel of Mark, L.P. Collegeville, MN., Page 152.

Reflection

Jesus talked often about the Kingdom of God. He talked about the Kingdom of God that already is prepared for us, already fulfilled that waits for those who love Him. He also talked about the Kingdom of God that is at hand, the Kingdom of God among us, and the Kingdom of God still in process, still evolving, sometimes visible and sometimes hidden and mysterious like a seed germinating below the surface.

In this weekend's Gospel, describing the Kingdom of God, Jesus says it is like a seed that is planted and germinates. Even though we can't always see the growth and the new life coming into being it is still happening. A man plants the seed and God causes the growing and the tiny seed eventually grows into this gigantic plant that bears fruit and that produces more seeds, and the process continues.

People at the time of Jesus were very much an agricultural people. They were close to the earth and engaged with nature. When Jesus used images related to agriculture and nature in His parables, they had to be very vivid and alive for them. Conversely, today, as a culture we tend to be more and more disconnected from the earth and from nature. We look at creation as an historical event, e.g. the big bang that occurred 12 to 13 billion years ago. The people in Jesus' day saw creation more as an ongoing reality. They saw themselves as even co-creators with God. They would prepare the soil, plant the seeds, pull the weeds, and God would send the rain and produce the sunshine and the seeds would grow. They would sleep and rise, and days would pass, and the crops would grow. They envisioned themselves as working hand-in-hand with God. This is the Kingdom of God, Jesus tells us, in the here and now. We are a part of God's plan. The Kingdom of God is still evolving in our hearts, in our lives and families, in our parishes, in our Church, in our community and in our world... in and through us!

Jesus is reminding us to trust in the sometimes-invisible movement of His Spirit. Just because we can't see the seeds growing in the ground, it does not mean that they are not growing and maturing. Kingdom work requires faith and trust in God. Kingdom work requires patience and endurance and perseverance. Together with the power of the Holy Spirit working in and through us we can and will make a difference in our world. And again, I remind you that there is no backup plan. We are it! Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of us your faithful and enkindle in us the fire of Your love.

Yours in Christ,



Personal Witness

During my lifetime I have had two good friends who were totally blind. Both are now deceased, and I believe with the Lord and now seeing all things clearly. My friend John was first to come into my life. He was heavily involved in my parish community as I was discerning priesthood. We first met at a parish retreat. We got to know each other quite well at subsequent retreats and parish gatherings. John was a deeply spiritual man who earned a master's degree in divinity. He had an amazing interior life and a deep personal relationship with Jesus. He also had an incredible knowledge of Sacred Scripture. We had some deep spiritual discussions. I admired his deep spirituality and even envied him a bit. He talked about spiritual things at a level that I had not yet experienced and quite often could not relate to or comprehend.

My friend Don was wounded and lost his sight during the Korean Conflict. He was a member of one of the parishes that I was assigned to. When I first met him, he was telling me about a trip that he and his wife had recently taken. He was describing the beautiful scenery in some detail including the beautiful and colorful lilacs in one of the towns that they had driven through. At first it was hard for me to believe that he was totally blind. As they traveled his wife would serve as his eyes and describe the scenery to him. Because he had perfect vision for the first 21 years of his life, he could picture the details in his mind in a very vivid way.

Don spoke often of his own interior life. He was a man of incredible faith. After he lost his sight, he turned to Jesus and developed a powerful personal relationship with Him. As his wife was his sight in this world, Jesus became his spiritual sight. He had a level of spirituality that I admired and yearned for myself. He challenged and inspired me to grow in my faith.

Unlike Don, John was born totally blind. When I talked about the beauty of a sunset or the beauty of nature he could not relate. He had no concept of sight, or colors and no explanations were possible. There was no starting point of reference. Sight is something that must be experienced. Over the years as I grew spiritually, I would from time to time recollect some of my conversations with John and now understand what he was talking about in his spiritual life. I had to experience what he experienced spiritually before I could relate. Prior to that I had no spiritual point of reference.

The lesson that I learned from my friends was to meet people wherever they are spiritually. That is exactly what Jesus did. He did not judge, He loved. Wherever they were in life He met them there. He invited them to get up, to turn away from sin, to change their lives, to follow Him. He did not leave them where He found them, but He met them where they were.

We live in the in-between times. We live between the first and second coming of Jesus. We live between promise and fulfillment, between blindness and sight, between dying and rising. We live between planting and harvest. We are like the planted seed in the darkness of the earth that strives to break out into the bright light. *We walk by faith and not by sight*, but we hope, and we yearn to see clearly. We are all at different stages in this process that we call life. The good news is that we are invited to journey together and help each other on the way. And Jesus meets us where we are and invites us to follow Him. He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

F. Glenn