

Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time B/2012

All the readings of this Sunday talk about the growth of the Church and human attitudes toward it. They invite us to realize that any growth requires patience, hope and trust in God who makes everything stand according to his bounty.

In the first reading, the prophet Ezekiel describes in an allegoric language the life of a cedar tree that God will plant on a high mountain in Israel. Although it is one of the smallest, it will become a big tree to the point that the birds of every kind will find refuge beneath it.

What is behind this text is the idea that God is master and sovereign. He exercises control over everything that exists in the world. In his mastering, he can lift some and bring low others; he can make prosperous as well as he can make poor.

All that helps understand what is at stake in today's Gospel as Jesus uses parables in order to talk about the kingdom of heaven. In today's parables, indeed, Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to seed scattered in a field by a farmer, but which spring forth and bear fruits without the owner necessarily knowing how it works. He also compares the kingdom of heaven to a mustard seed, the smallest of all, which in the end becomes a big tree.

What do we learn from this Gospel? Before we discover the truth of these parables, let us, first, remember what a parable is. In fact, a parable is, according to Webster's Dictionary, a "short, fictitious story" or a way of speaking that uses images and symbols in order to communicate a truth. A second thing we need to know is that each parable has its background or a context through which Jesus spoke it to the crowd or the disciples.

Let us start with the context. One of the problems the disciples faced at their time was that, in spite of all the signs performed and the work done, Jesus' teaching was not accepted by everybody. Humanly speaking, it was as though they failed in their mission because the result did not follow at all. In the end, that could just lead to discouragement and despair.

In these two parables, Jesus tries to answer to this problem by showing a contrast between human attitudes and God's efficiency that is performant even where it seems to be a failure. It is in this contrast that we find the truth Jesus wants to communicate and the point of these parables.

The first thing we learn, then, is about the inevitable growth of God's kingdom. In fact, when Jesus says that the kingdom is like a man who scatters the seed and which sprout and grow, yielding fruits and grain until harvest, without the man knowing how, he wants us to realize that nothing can stop the growth of God's kingdom.

Because God is behind everything that exists, the growth of his reign is under way. It does not depend on human efforts, as important as they might be, but on God himself. That is why the growth of the kingdom may be like that of a plant, imperceptible from day to day, but over the years will come to its consummation.

It does not mean, however, that because the growth depends on God, we have nothing to do about it. If we dwell in such an attitude, we will destroy the sense of our mission as

disciples of Jesus. Of course, no one can make the seed grow, but we should not forget that, like a farmer who tills the soil for a good harvest, we can create the conditions in which the seed can grow well.

All that brings us to human attitudes we should have with regard to the growth of God's kingdom. First of all, there is patience. This is a very important attitude. Because we live in a culture of fast things, the temptation is strong to look for an immediate result in the work of God. And yet, God works according to his time and his calendar, sometimes very slowly. What I am saying here is true for God's work as well as for our human undertakings. We really need to be patient, to take the time for ourselves to work and to give time to people to adjust their lives to the values of the kingdom of God.

That being said, we need also the attitude of hope and not despair. Hope means that we anticipate God's crowning of what we do because he is behind every work we do. However, it does not mean that we have to be naïve or idealistic by thinking that everything will be ok, because God is in control. We have to be realistic and play our part. What it means is that we have to give the best of ourselves in everything we do with the firm conviction that God will reward us and everything we do in his name. That is why, confidence in God is also important.

The second thing we learn is that the growth of God's kingdom is gradual and not spontaneous. That is what the parable of the mustard seed would like to say, namely that the humble beginning will become one day a great work.

There is a big truth in this consideration when we look at our own lives. We were just small babies and today we have become these great and respectful adults: fathers, mothers, grandparents, great grandparents, etc. How nice is all that! Imagine, for instance, that all the big ideas and the inventions that have transformed our lives have started from an individual and from him to the whole world.

Another example can be taken from music. It has just eight notes, but from these notes we can have song, hymn, symphony, opera, concerto, sonata, etc. The same is true about literature. We have just twenty six letters of the alphabet, but from them we have a variety of literature: novel, drama, movie, history, etc.

What all this would like to say is that the small acts of daily life make a difference. We should never be tired of repeating them or discouraged to start again. We need patience when we start something. We need courage to keep going when we face difficulties. We need to hope that from the small beginning will come one day a big enterprise. We need to trust God, whatever might be the conditions of our work. That is true for God's work as well as for our human work. Let us pray, then, that the Lord my give us the necessary attitudes we need to work for him and for our fellows. May God bless you all!

Ezekiel 17: 22-24; 2 Corinthians 5: 6-10; Mark 4: 26-34



Homily Date: June 17, 2012

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Document Name: 20120617homily.pdf