

God Works In Mysterious Ways

Ezek. 17: 22-24; Ps. 92; 2 Cor. 5: 6-10; Mk. 4: 26-34

This Sunday is the 11th Sunday in Ordinary Time. Ordinary Time. It seems so... 'ordinary'. After the long Lenten period, the even longer Easter season, and the rapid succession of Solemnities that followed, Ordinary Time can be somewhat of a let-down; an anti-climax. As we come to the end of spring and enter the summer season, it can seem like we are easing into the summer vacation of our faith.

But this is not so. Jesus takes this opportunity to teach His followers an important lesson about the Kingdom of God and, as is often the case, He uses an analogy drawn from agriculture to bring the point home to the many people who come from a farming background.

Jesus speaks about a farmer who scatters seeds and then goes home to sleep. The farmer gets up and goes to sleep day after day while the seed sprouts and then grows until the farmer can harvest the ripened grain. Jesus says that the grain grows without the farmer knowing how and, it would appear, without any effort on his part.

Even for those of us who have had no experience with farming, this story does not ring true. Even if the closest we have come to agriculture is growing some flowers and vegetables in our gardens, we know that there is a lot of work to be done: weeding and watering and fertilizing. The point is that, even after all of our work, it is the action of God that ultimately results in the plants growing. He does this in ways that we do not know and that we do not understand. As St. Paul says in his letter to the Corinthians: 'we walk by faith, not by sight'.

Agriculture requires faith. The farmer must rely on God to provide the proper amount of sun, the proper amount of rain, and a myriad of other conditions to ensure a successful harvest. Even home gardeners, have their faith tested every year. The annual plants die every fall but even the perennial plants and shrubs appear to die. As March and April arrive every year, we look to those plants to see if new shoots and leaves are appearing. For the longest time, nothing seems to be happening and we begin to despair that a plant has been lost. But one day, we see a small shoot poke its head out of the ground and our faith is strengthened. God has been working in unknown ways. We need to maintain our faith and to trust in the action of God. This applies to everything in our lives.

Jesus tells the well-known parable of the mustard seed to explain about the Kingdom of God. The mustard seed is very small but it grows into a large bush that can provide shelter to many birds. Jesus, although He was the Son of God, became small by being the servant of all and dying on the Cross. Jesus is the mustard seed and the Cross is the bush that provides shelter and salvation for all who believe in Him. The mustard seed dies and sprouts into a great bush. Jesus died on the Cross and the Church and the Christian faith sprouted from that seed. Both the sprouting of the mustard seed and the sprouting of Christianity happened through the action of God without us knowing exactly how.

If we plant the seed of salvation in our hearts and allow God to cause it to sprout and grow, the words of the Psalmist will come true:

The righteous will flourish like the palm tree,
and grow like a cedar in Lebanon.
They are planted in the house of the Lord;
they flourish in the courts of our God.