

Homily for the 11th Sunday in Ordinary Times

June 16-17, 2018

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

Preacher: Jeanne Mooney

In this week's gospel from Mark, Jesus tells two stories to the crowds that have gathered to listen. First, he compares the kingdom of God to a farmer scattering seed: it sprouts without the farmer knowing how or when, and in time, he reaps the harvest. The parable of the mustard seed follows: a seed that "of its own accord" grows into a huge plant that blesses God's creation with its shade. Jesus uses the plain language of the parables to help the crowds understand how the kingdom grows in God's time, not ours. At a later time, he takes the disciples aside to explain more fully.

Like the farmer scattering seed, we watch and wait in our lives to see our work come to fruition. At times, the only thing that appears to be growing is our frustrated desire to see results! Pierre Teilhard de Chardin speaks to our restlessness in his prayer, "Patient Trust:"

Above all, trust in the slow work of God.

We are quite naturally impatient in everything to reach the end without delay.

We should like to skip the intermediate stages.

We are impatient of being on the way to something unknown, something new.

And yet it is the law of all progress

that it is made by passing through

some stages of instability—

and that it may take a very long time.

As impatient as we may be to see the harvest, we must wait for the seeds to grow as nature intended: from the first green stem and leaves, poking out of the dirt, to the tall plant hanging low with grain. Sometimes we must also wait, living in the tension between the known and what is to come, for ourselves and those we love.

In this summer between my son's high school graduation and college orientation, I'm waiting to see what comes next. My husband and I have nurtured his interest in math and science, pulled out the weeds of procrastination and perfectionism, and nourished him with plenty of peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. How did he grow so quickly from the toddler scribbling numbers to the young man working calculus problems? Have we prepared him for the rigors of college math and the calculus of balancing studies and a social life? Who will he become as he moves into this new adventure? I wish that Jesus would take me aside, put his hand on my shoulder, and assure me that all will be well.

Paul's words in the second reading ring true: we walk by faith, not by sight. Like the Corinthians, we follow best practices. We trust in the God who walks with us that we are taking the right steps. In our parish Faith Formation sessions, we trust God with the faith of our little ones. We nurture the seeds that God has planted in them. We tell them stories, like Jesus did, "as they (are) able to understand." Often we don't see how their faith sprouts and grows. Sometimes, we catch a glimpse of understanding when a lesson takes root. As we do with our own children, we walk beside them for a few years, and then send them on to their next adventure. For the next part of their journey, they remain in God's hands.

The spectacular success of the mustard seed gives me hope for the "little seeds" in our programs. Once God plants that seed in us, it can grow until it's the "largest of plants." How does it grow? Catechists plan engaging activities, pore over volumes of material, and give witness by our own personal relationships with God, but their faith grows in God's time, not ours. God planted the seed; we are the gardeners.

