

Homily for the 11th Sunday in Ordinary Time

June 12-13, 2021

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

Preacher: Gloria Ulterino

Flourishing! I love that word! I love the way it feels in my mouth when I say it. Even more, I love what it means. Alive! Abundant! Thriving! Perhaps what I love most is this: it's a true word of God's desires for each of us, for all of us.

Especially now, as we return to Ordinary Time, just beginning to emerge from a horrifying pandemic. Indeed, we know what it is to feel lost and isolated. Discouraged, perhaps even desolate, all the while never quite giving up hope for something better. So it has always been, for our ancestors in faith, as well.

Take the folks to whom the prophet Ezekiel is writing, for example. It's the sixth century before Christ. Here they are, so far away from their beloved home of Israel, banished to the land of Babylon. Will they *ever* see their homeland again? Will they *ever* know a new and powerful king? Yes, proclaims Ezekiel. For a new king will arise from the now-humbled House of David, described here as the tender shoot from the lofty cedar. When he comes, the haughty, neighboring, kings will be brought low.

Then there's all the folks who are listening intently to Jesus today: the crowds, along with his disciples. There's something about him! His stories. His understanding of their struggles. His words of encouragement and hope. He loves to make his point by telling parables. In effect, today he asks: How are we like a seed? A tightly-encased mustard seed. The smallest of all seeds. Well, we all know about the darkness of the soil, not unlike the darkness of the pandemic.

And yet, there's more. So much more. God is at work, beyond all imagining, even here, even in the darkness. God's promise, the gift of what lies within, is crushed, just like the mustard seed. Painfully, powerfully broken open. And yet, look what emerges! The *possibilities* of God, beyond our knowing. Perhaps a gorgeous flower. A piece of savory fruit. Or, in us, the fruition of sublime gifts that God has buried in every human heart. Indeed, even while we are *clueless* about this process, (emphasized only by Mark, in this parable he shares with Matthew and Luke), God can produce *flourishing* life. In us, through us, and for us.

So, what does this ask of *us*, each a tiny part of the magnificent Body of Christ?

I think of the woman who suffered the unspeakable loss of two young children. Somehow, in some way, God brought her to the realization that she could best comfort others by helping found the hospice movement here in Rochester. What a profound source of compassion she has become!

Then there's the woman who is now approaching middle age. She welcomes us with a huge smile when we encounter her on her walker, doing her best to make her words understood. She was born with cerebral palsy, you see. But God gifted her with parents who courageously raised her to know that her brilliant mind and caring heart would never be wasted. After completing college studies, after being rejected for job after job, she was offered a responsible position at Wegmans. She's been there for some thirty years now.

I think, too, of my cousin, who has wrestled with her own set of difficulties. A retired kindergarten teacher, she now writes childrens' books that always produce some giggles, while speaking to their young hearts.

So, then, folks, here we are: the Body of Christ, together. Tiny parts, each of us, who can contribute to flourishing life for a world that has been broken open, crushed, and so in need of God's possibilities. Depending on our own gifts, we can each do something, no matter how small. We can pray, of course. And perhaps write letters of advocacy and encouragement. We can sing. (Last Sunday was the first Mass without masks, for all who are vaccinated. My husband, and the man behind me, both basses, sang their hearts out, and I was moved to tears by how very much I had missed this music.)

We can— and we *must*—follow through on God's nudges. In the process, we might never know how powerfully we can touch others with our broken-open gifts of God. Finally, as an older person, I take particular delight in the assurance of today's psalmist (92:14, NAB): Those "planted in the house of the Lord ... shall bear fruit even in old age; vigorous and sturdy shall they be." Now, *that's* flourishing life!