

Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

June 16, 2024

Most of us probably want the best things in life to grow. Maybe all of us, actually. We like it when we see our number of true friends grow from a few to more than we can count. They provide us with support and guidance and laughs and memories.

And we like it when we notice the bottom line on our bank statements and investments get larger and larger. The increases in our finances provide us with more opportunities and options in life, provide us with a type of security that puts our minds at ease. We like it when our new house or property is a little larger than our previous one. It usually confirms for us that we are doing something right, that we have made some good choices.

And we like it when the exercise we have engaged in pays off and we start to see a more attractive and healthy person in the mirror. A healthier you or me benefits us in many ways, enabling us to enjoy a bigger variety of things, and usually adds productive years to our lives.

We like it when the relationship we are in moves from something superficial to something much deeper, and hopefully, more lasting. That increases our hope that we might have found the “right person”.

In today’s Gospel passage from St. Mark we hear Jesus once again talking about the “kingdom”. And in particular, we hear Jesus describing how this kingdom will develop and grow, from something the size of a little mustard seed to something much larger, something that provides a kind of shade for creatures to dwell in. His point seems to be that from almost nothing something wonderful can blossom, from little can come much, from the invisible can come something visible and beautiful and helpful and necessary.

That sounds pretty wonderful, doesn’t it? It brings us comfort to think about God bringing about whatever it is that God wants to bring about,

that God will see to it that the world gets everything it needs to become the beautiful place he created it to be. In other words, it seems to imply that God is going to assure that it happens, that God will make sure the kingdom comes about and flourishes and is made manifest in the way he wants.

In other words, God will do everything to make sure the seed is sown, the seed is watered, the ground is nourished, the sun will shine, and the kingdom will grow in unimaginable ways. And that's probably just fine with us. We get to sit on the sidelines and watch God do his "magic".

The million dollar question is, how do we expect all of that to happen? How does the "kingdom" come about, grow and flourish? Maybe we think it's going to happen in the blink of an eye, by God "waving his hand" and making it so. After all, that's how God created the world, from nothing. And so, maybe God continues to get what he wants by doing things the same way, by exercising his will and power from without, all by himself.

But think for a moment. One person decides to hurt another person and our all-powerful, all-loving God doesn't stop it. We poison the planet and God doesn't heal it. Some people in the world don't have enough to eat and God doesn't feed them. Many people are oppressed and held down and God doesn't free them. And some people are treated unfairly and God doesn't make sure they get justice. What gives?

It should be pretty obvious that whatever world God wants to bring about, whatever "kingdom" he wants us to dwell in, is the one God does not want to grow on his own, he does not want to "force" it upon us. The "ushering in" of the kingdom well, that was all him. It was through the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus that the seeds of the "kingdom" were planted. The Paschal Mystery is what makes this new world, this new way of living, this "kingdom" possible. Without the saving act of Jesus we would still be lost. But now everything has changed.

That means that everything can be made better, everything can grow into something more beautiful than it was before, every person, every situation, every relationship, and every community, everything you can think of. Yet, God wants our complete cooperation in all of it, he wants you and me to be co-creators in the beautiful world, the beautiful kingdom he wants for all of us.

It is by wanting our cooperation that God shows us how much he respects us and loves us, shows us that we don't have to live as obstacles to his grace, but can actually be channels of it.

And there are no limits as to what is possible. And so, that means that it is not just through the things we have a lot of, the "large seeds" within us that will bring about the kingdom. It also means that God wants to transform the world through the very things we have little of by taking those tiny things and helping them to develop into things of great size that make real differences in the lives of others.

And so, we must ask - what do you and I have little of?

Compassion? God wants that to grow in you until you try to see everything from another person's point of view.

Generosity? God wants that to grow in you until showering others with every good thing becomes a second nature of you.

Forgiveness? God wants that to grow in you until you understand your own need for forgiveness and thereby want to extend that gift to each person who has wronged you.

Kindness? God wants that to grow in you until whatever mean-spiritedness or bad temper within you dissolves away leaving only patience and understanding.

The list could go on and on.

My dear friends, the kingdom is present, but not always visible. It is real, but not manifest to all. Begun, but still growing into a tree of every good thing, one that will bring rest and shelter and safety to all who choose to dwell within it. But the degree to which all of that happens, the speed in which it happens, the clarity with which it is brought into focus well, that's largely dependent on us. God just seems to want it that way.

Do we want the same? Do we want to help grow the kingdom?

If so, then it's time to do our part. And that can only happen if we start acting, start thinking, start seeing, start living as God wants us to live. And there is no better way to start than by identifying the things we think we have little of and then letting God grow them in ways we can't imagine. Who knows what we might become? Who knows what the world might become.

The seeds are there. God's help is always there. But he wants our okay, our openness, our willingness to allow him to make us so much more than we were yesterday.

So let's give it to him and watch ourselves grow. We're sure to be so much more than we could ever expect, the best versions of ourselves.

