

Homily for the 11th Sunday of Ordinary Time - Year B

St. Peter's Sunday 10:00/12:00/5:00 Masses - June 13, 2021

Ezekiel 17:22-24 "The Lord will plant a cedar sprig on a mountain, under which every bird shall live."

Psalms 92:1-15 "The righteous shall grow like a cedar. In old age they still produce fruit."

2 Cor 5:6-10 "Each will receive recompense for what that done in the body, good or evil."

Mark 4:26-34 "The kingdom of heaven is like a small seed which produces branches for the birds ."

From Tiny Seeds

Introduction: The Plan

From the beginning, God's plan has always been to share his Blessed life with us, in each present moment and also in the life to come. He has no other purpose because he has no need of us to make him more perfect or holy or complete.

From the beginning, the species created on the 6th day - yes, man and woman - have had a fascination with everything created during the rest of the six days of creation.

From the beginning, God made the man and woman responsible for taming the wildness of that creation, but also caring for it. We call that stewardship. We have sometimes loved and cared for creation but, very often, we have dominated and manipulated and grasped and even abused what God has made for our happiness and fulfillment, including each other.

Seeds and Trees in the Plan

All of creation speaks of God's plan. That is why images from nature are so frequently part of the story which explains the divine plan of salvation. The prophets and kings and psalmists of the Old Testament use those images, and certainly Jesus does, as we will see.

God didn't just build a movie set for us to hang out in until judgment day. He made all things, and us along with them, as almost infinite signs of his goodness, his holiness and his plan for our salvation. Everywhere we look, we see the possibilities of this goodness.

St. Augustine admitted that he made the mistake of worshipping creation instead of the creator: I plunged into those lovely created things which you made. You were with me, but I was not with you. The lovely things kept me far from you, though if they did not have their existence in you, they had no existence at all. His obsession with things of the created order were a kind of worship of creation.

We are dealing with the same obsession when it comes to the environmental movement of today. Everyone wants to save the planet from various forms of degradation. For the Christian, we must understand that, if we want this movement to have success, it has to be because all of creation belongs to God, not to us. This is the only way to avoid idolatry i.e. worshipping nature instead of the one who made it.

Adam and Eve were tempted to worship the creation. "The serpent said: God knows that when you eat of the fruit of the forbidden tree, your eyes will be opened and you will be like God. So when they saw that the tree was good for food and that it was a delight to the eyes and that the tree was to be desired to, they took of its fruit and ate."

Our biggest problem is always the same. We come to worship ourselves instead of God. The Catechism articulates it powerfully: Man, tempted by the devil, let his trust in his creator die in his heart and, abusing his freedom disobeyed God's command. This was the first sin. All sin after that would be disobedience toward God and lack of trust in His goodness.

In this context, we are not trying to save the planet for our children and grandchildren. They are not gods who demand this of us. No, we are trying to save the planet because God made us its stewards, so that it would be a blessing to us and our children and grandchildren. It is written on every

page that, for the people of God, plans that exclude God ultimately end in disaster. God is our reason for doing the right thing. God is the source of all right things. That is why God is called the holy and righteous one.

2 Corinthians: Our Bodies in God's Plan

In today's reading from St. Paul, he explains that our bodies are a part of the created order and that it is IN our bodies that we obey or reject God's commandments. The Corinthians considered human bodily existence as an obstacle to union with Jesus. That was the dominant philosophy of the time. His opponents in Corinth concluded that Paul's bodily sufferings and tribulations weakened his claim to be an apostle. Surely God would not treat an apostle this way?

Unlike his opponents, Paul holds the body in high esteem. He replies that, whether one is in the body, meaning this life, or with the Lord, meaning after death, what matters most is striving to please the Lord. In fact, at the final judgment, you will receive the 'recompense' for what you have done in the body.

St Paul talks about being at home in the body, meaning this life, or away from the body, meaning the next life. Home or away. It sounds like the hockey playoffs. It did make me think of a hockey story. Harry Neale was on Hockey Night in Canada, talking about when he was coaching a very bad Vancouver Canucks team, even worse than this year's team. They were setting records for losing. He said: We couldn't win at home and we couldn't win on the road. My greatest failing as a coach is that I couldn't find anywhere else for us to play.

The point is, of course, that there is no other place to play. St. Paul is saying the same thing. Do good rather than evil within the created order because you are preparing for eternal life. Those are the two realities. The way you do that is to walk by faith and not by sight. Keep your eyes on God at all times.

Ezekiel: Prophecy of the trees

The prophet Ezekiel uses powerful images from creation. God is going to take the smallest twig from the great cedar tree. Those trees grow for over two hundred years and are majestic. But God will take the tiniest part of it, a twig, which will become, down the road and out of sight, a future Davidic king. The great cedars are the kings of the world who will recognize the power of the Lord.

The psalmist uses poetic language to describe those who live in harmony with this created life, in trust and loyalty. Even when they are old, they will still be full of sap, still green. Now, I'm not so sure I want anyone to say to me, "You're full of sap," but the point is that creation itself gives the image of being planted in the house of the Lord.

Mark: Kingdom Seeds

Jesus' parables tell his listeners about the kingdom of heaven. We need to understand that this is not so much a place but God himself. And, while God is separate from his creation, he is like what he has made. In the first parable, a man plants seed, but God has to take over because it grows with the farmer knowing how. This is a mystery that God has planted within creation itself. It is like the poem: All I Really Need To Know I Learned In Kindergarten: "Remember the little seed in the styrofoam cup: The roots go down and the plant goes up and nobody really knows how or why, but we are all like that." We have to water and till and care for the seed but the earth itself brings forth the harvest.

If the kingdom depends upon human effort, it will fail. If humans choose to trust God, unimaginable success can result. We are given the challenge to imagine how great the kingdom will be. The growth of the kingdom of God is a mystery outside human control. Human beings can play a role in its growth but the growth itself is in God's hands.

The parable of the mustard seed is one of the most powerful images of the relationship between creation and the kingdom of heaven. Jesus uses a small seed, so small but it grows into a great bush that houses many birds. This kingdom that Jesus is describing won't start like a great cedar but only a small seed.

Today, the Church looks powerless. We have participated in the sins of the world, against vulnerable peoples and against creation itself. In the last year, we have lost much of our sense of community. But Jesus continues to plant tiny seeds. The small ways we will be called on to rebuild the Church are not insignificant. I think Jesus is asking us to believe in small beginnings; in our own life, in the lives of others and in the life of the church.

The kingdom of God perhaps begins with the action of grace in each soul. God silently works transformation in us. What happens in the church also happens in each soul, especially when we humbly trust in God's plan for us, for others, and for all of creation.

We have faith that God has a plan for us and the world, even though it seems to be happening slowly. Jesus was born as a baby and grew to be the one to whom the world looks with hope. The church began small, then grew into two billion Christians. We sometimes feel small, but we can grow into Christians who enter the kingdom of heaven.

Call To Action

I will conclude with just a small part of a prayer of repentance and solidarity with Indigenous Peoples following Canada's Truth & Reconciliation Commission: O God and Creator, we praise you for your many gifts. Give us hearts that burn with love for you, who come to us in every language and culture and in every gift of creation. Make us stewards of one another's dignity ... as unique peoples ... as gifts to the human family ... as your beloved children.

Key Passages

Collect: *O God ... grant us your grace, that in following your commands, we may please you by our resolve and our deeds.*

Entrance Antiphon: *O Lord, hear my voice. Do not abandon or forsake me, O God my Saviour.*

Ezekiel: *I myself will take a sprig from the lofty top of a cedar. On the mountain height of Israel, I will plant it, that it may bear fruit and become a noble cedar. Under it every kind of bird will live. All the trees of the field shall know that I am the Lord. I dry up the green tree and make the dry tree flourish. I the Lord have spoken.*

Psalms: *The righteous flourish like the palm tree, and grow like a cedar in Lebanon. They are planted in the house of the Lord. In old age they still produce fruit. They are always green and full of sap. The Lord is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him.*

2 Corinthians: *Brothers and sisters, even though we are at home in the body ... we walk by faith, not by sight. So, whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. For all of us must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may receive recompense for what he or she has done in the body, whether good or evil.*

Mark: *Jesus said: The kingdom of God is as if a man would scatter seed on the ground and it would sprout and grow without his knowing how. But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with the sickle because the harvest has come. Jesus also said: The kingdom of God is like a mustard seed, the smallest of all the seeds; Yet when it is sown, it puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade. Jesus spoke the word to them as they were able to hear it. But, he explained everything in private to his disciples.*

Prayer Over the Offerings: *We pray that the sustenance provided by these offerings may not fail us in body or in spirit.*