

Readings: no. 92, p. 576; BG, p. 334 1st Reading: Ezekiel 17.22-24 2nd Reading: 2 Corinthians 5.6-10 Gospel: Mark 4.26-34 **11th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME**

People across Alberta have transposed their plants and flowers from winter greenhouses to outdoor gardens. Both wild and cultivated shrubbery carpet the earth presenting its unrivaled beauty. The prophet Ezekiel today seems to remind us, how fond, God is of horticultural. The Creator just simply likes trees. According to Genesis accounts, trees precede humankind on creation's timeline. Recall, "The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in their seed, each according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening, and there was morning, the third day." We come along on day six.

Fittingly, Mother Church cycles us again, this week into Ordinary Time after moving through Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, Ascension, Trinity, Pentecost, and Corpus Christi Sundays. Ordinary time takes on a contemplative tone, that we might engage to patiently consider deeper spiritual growth. We should not be surprised that, the season's liturgical colour coincides with nature's green. The lengthiest period of the Church's calendar is dedicated for this purpose. In Latin, the word "ordinalis" describes an organizational schema and is from where English derives the word "order." We see the term "Holy Orders" employed within the context of the Sacraments of Service. Bishops, priests, and deacons enter this state of life through ordination.

Ordinary time is thus rhythmic and reaches out to welcome spiritual growth in our daily living, here and now. Sacramental time, indeed, becomes growth time and nothing dismissive, plain, or ordinary ever when experiencing God.

The question these observations expose, point us towards the mystery of God, that shows us Corpus Christi, Pentecost, Trinity, Ascension, Easter and of course Incarnation. The greatest of all creation events. By-Chance is never part of God's methodology because it operates outside order in a frustrated self-loopback mode. Friends, the Christian life is summoned towards the Body and Blood of Christ, which in turn is ordered to and from the Most Holy Trinity, to whom the Spirit of Pentecost collects and guides. The believer's purpose derives its meaning and energy from being in alignment with this trajectory. We don't know how a flower grows but we do know that wonder and awe in this Sacred Mystery holds our gaze and draws out our spiritual growth like water and sunshine. "Thy Will be done on earth and in heaven," is rescued from the abstract to become possible.

This pandemic has also showered us with an array of public health orders. Citizenry discerns whether directives promote growth or its opposite. None-the-less, science and nature are never the believer's enemy when they seek to uncover truth, wonder, and awe.

Ezekiel today foreshadows The Trinity's most excellent of all creation events, namely Incarnation. In using the first person, "I myself will take a sprig from the lofty top of a cedar," we apprehend God's yearning for personal involvement in our spiritual growth. The prophet describes God saying, "I myself will take, set, break, and plant a branch." Then, "All the trees will know, I am the Lord." The movements seem almost liturgical, from the greatness and humility of a God who sends His Son to be our True Vine.

Jesus, carrying the Father's fondness for creation, comes to quench our thirst and feed our souls with His Very Real Presence. "Jesus did not cling to His equality with the Father, within the Trinity, but emptied Himself." Our Lord teaches using allegory and figures of speech ways to cultivate minds and hearts. Unlike the absolute language Ezekiel places on the Father's lips, Jesus, like an artist, paints an image in our minds that carefully orchestrates our spiritual growth.

The kingdom of God that we pray unfolds each time we recite the Lord's Prayer, can only at best, be described phenomenologically. In the Patristic period, Origen wrote, "those who pray for the coming of the Kingdom of God pray without any doubt for the Kingdom of God that they contain in themselves. And they pray that this kingdom might bear fruit and attain its fullness." Pope Benedict XVI added that, "there is a growing tendency to hold that Christ uses these words (kingdom of God) to refer to himself: He, who is in our midst, is the 'Kingdom of God,' only we do not know him.

Pope Benedict is telling us that our spiritual growth realizes fulfillment in the Real Presence of Christ. By the way in which Jesus speaks of the Kingdom of God, we are led to unpack the overwhelming evidence that in Jesus, God himself is present among us.”¹ Therefore, Friends, spiritual growth that deepens intimacy with God finds its place under the branches of Jesus’ outstretched arms. The Seed of the Father who gives totally of Himself and who nurtures us through Sacred Word and This Holy Eucharist.

Amen

¹ From Pope Benedict XVI, (2008) *Jesus of Nazareth, Part 1. From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*. P.60-61.