

Sunday June 13, 2021

## 11th Sunday in Ordinary Time

### Parishioner Reflection

*By: Kerry Tucker*

Today's gospel contains two of Jesus' parables that focus on the Kingdom of God. As you may know, a parable, according to Oxford Languages, "is a simple story used to illustrate a moral or spiritual lesson, as told by Jesus in the Gospels". At the same time, as the author of Mark notes in today's gospel, Jesus uses parables to obscure his message to "the crowd" while explaining their meaning in private to "his disciples" (Mark 4:1, 33-34). So, the "lesson" in any parable may be opaque to some extent unless Jesus' explanation to the disciples is included in the gospel. And I have not found any explanation from Jesus in the gospels for the parable that we will focus on here. Nevertheless, let us try to see what the "moral or spiritual lesson" Jesus may have been teaching about the Kingdom of God in this parable. And see how we might apply this lesson in the church and in our lives today.

In my experience, "The Parable of the Mustard Seed" (Mark 4: 30-32), as it is titled in the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) translation (on which the readings and the gospel in the Sunday Missal are based), is the parable that is most discussed in homilies or devotions about the Kingdom of God. So, it may be most fruitful to turn our attention here, primarily, to the first parable Jesus uses in today's Gospel to teach something about God's kingdom. This is the parable which the NRSV translation calls "The Parable of the Growing Seed" (Mark 4:26-29). It can be found in the second paragraph of today's gospel.

First, though, it might be helpful to make clear what, generally, in scripture, the "kingdom of God" means. I have personally found it to be a somewhat confusing idea, often tending to equate it with the church. But, according to the New Catholic Encyclopedia, "[t]he biblical expressions "Kingdom of God," "Kingdom of Christ," and "Kingdom of Heaven," all roughly equivalent, refer to three different aspects of the divine lordship or sovereignty over creation...a territory or space governed by a king (= kingdom); a king's activity or time of governing (= reign); the office or function of being a king (= kingship)...this biblical formula is central to Jesus' way of conceiving the relationship between God and the world, God and humankind..." So, from this, it appears that the church would be a part of God's kingdom because it exists (at least in part) in a location, the "world", that God rules over, but it is not the kingdom itself. The New Catholic Encyclopedia says about this that, "The church is not the kingdom, nor is it heaven, but it is the path to them—that is, a gathering of those who look forward to them. The

church is a sign of the kingdom's partial presence; she is at the service of the kingdom, its proto-sacrament.”

The spiritual lesson that Jesus is teaching in this story, based on the note on Mark 4: 26-29 from The New Oxford Annotated Bible, 3rd edition, (“An Ecumenical Study Bible” according to the front cover), is the inevitability of the establishment of God’s kingdom. The note says, “The kingdom of God will surely come to full fruition, just as the seed inevitably sprouts, grows, and produces a harvest (cf. Joel 3.13).”

In this time when, here in Ontario, we are beginning to emerge from restrictions caused by the pandemic, we can perhaps take the lesson from this parable that, whatever effect the pandemic or anything else may seem to have had on the “com[ing]” of “Thy kingdom”, (as we pray for every mass in the “Our Father”) we, as the church and as individuals, can trust that, nevertheless, finally, God’s full rule will come.