

Fr. Rudy's Reflections

The Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

June 16, 2024

The Growth of a Seed

My Brothers and Sisters in the Risen Lord,

Happy Father's Day to all our wonderful fathers!

As we consider today's Gospel, some of us might recall Vincent van Gogh's painting, *The Sower at Sunset*. Van Gogh (1853-1890) was fascinated by the figure of the *sower* that he believed captured the essence of agricultural life as an honorable endeavor intertwined with the cycle of life and renewal. The sower, scattering seeds at dusk, symbolizes hope and faith that growth and harvest will ensue, despite life's uncertainties. This imagery leads us to the parables Jesus shares in today's Gospel of Mark, which also revolve around sowing seeds and the mysterious growth of the Kingdom of God.

A parable, a simple story used to illustrate a moral or spiritual lesson, is a favored teaching tool of Jesus. Through parables, he conveys profound truths in a relatable way, drawing from the everyday experiences of his listeners. Agricultural parables, in particular, resonated deeply with Jesus's audience, who were largely farmers and laborers familiar with the worries of planting and harvesting. These stories are not just about farming; they reveal the mysteries of God's kingdom and how it unfolds in our lives, even today.

In the first parable Jesus describes growing seeds that are scattered by a man who, without his care and intervention, watches as they sprout and grow. This parable highlights several key concepts: the Kingdom of God is not something we can force into being or manipulate to fit our plans. It grows in its own time and way, often imperceptibly, demanding our trust and patience. Our role is to scatter the seeds—to share God's word and love—and trust that God will bring about growth. This evokes the notion that "if you build it, they will come," underscoring the inherent nature of God's work in the world.

The second parable of the mustard seed further enriches our understanding. Jesus likens the Kingdom of God to a tiny mustard seed that grows into a large bush, providing shelter for birds of the air. The mustard seed, despite its humble size, becomes a sturdy and expansive plant, symbolizing the Kingdom's potential to start from the smallest beginnings and grow into something grand and all-encompassing. Mustard plants, though considered weeds by some, are medicinal, used as a spice, and can transform their surroundings, bringing life and color to barren spaces. This parable emphasizes the transformative power of God's Kingdom that can spread and flourish, offering refuge and hope to all humankind, much like this great bush providing shelter for God's creatures.

Mark's Gospel, with its compelling and often mysterious narratives, invites us to participate fully in the reign of God. Today's parables remind us that the Kingdom of God operates beyond our comprehension and control, growing in hidden and wondrous ways. Our task is to trust in God's process, scatter the seeds of faith, and participate in the unfolding mystery of God's Kingdom, allowing it to transform our lives and the world around us. As van Gogh's sower scatters seeds with hope and expectation, so we too are called to sow the seeds of God's love, trusting in the divine promise of growth and harvest.

"I have a mustard seed, and I'm not afraid to use it."—Pope Benedict XVI

Yours in Christ

Fr. Rudy