

Great things start with a small beginning
Lectio Divina of the 11th Sunday B

Opening Prayer: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Heavenly Father, We thank you for inviting us to meditate on your eternal words for the growth of our faith. We are like mustard seeds but planted in the church, the garden of your Son Jesus. Bless us that we may bear abundant fruits with our tiniest labors of love and faith. Lord, Help us to have faith and not doubt. Help us to hear your message in a way that makes it come alive to us personally and to know that you are talking to us because faith comes from hearing from You. Father, even the disciples who walked with Jesus needed to strengthen their faith. Jesus told them if their faith was only the size of a mustard seed, they could uproot trees and crumble mountains. Lord, we need more faith like the disciples. Increase our faith. Grow our belief in You so that we would be strong in the Lord and ready to battle against the doubts planted by the enemy. We make this prayer through Christ our Lord - Amen.

Reading: A reading from the book of the prophet Ezekiel 17:22-24

Thus says the Lord GOD: I, too, will take from the crest of the cedar, from its topmost branches tear off a tender shoot, and plant it on a high and lofty mountain; on the mountain heights of Israel I will plant it. It shall put forth branches and bear fruit, and become a majestic cedar. Birds of every kind shall dwell beneath it, every winged thing in the shade of its boughs. And all the trees of the field shall know that I, the LORD, bring low the high tree, lift high the lowly tree, wither up the green tree, and make the withered tree bloom. As I, the LORD, have spoken, so will I do. **(The Word of the Lord/ Thanks be to God)**

Commentary: Ezekiel's allegory of the cedar tree stands for the restoration of the Davidic monarchy after the exile. Ezekiel prophesies the better days coming for the Chosen People, when Yahweh will take back His people once more and dwell in their midst forever and transplant the exiled people of Israel in the land of their fathers. In that cedar, the image "every kind of bird will live," is a message of inclusion for the gentiles in God's plan. This prophecy finds fulfillment in the coming of Jesus.

Responsorial Psalm 92: Lord, it is good to give thanks to you.

It is good to give thanks to the LORD, to sing praise to your name, Most High,
To proclaim your kindness at dawn and your faithfulness throughout the night.

R. Lord, it is good to give thanks to you.

The just one shall flourish like the palm tree, like a cedar of Lebanon shall he grow.
They that are planted in the house of the LORD shall flourish in the courts of our God.

R. Lord, it is good to give thanks to you.

They shall bear fruit even in old age; vigorous and sturdy shall they be,
Declaring how just is the LORD, my rock, in whom there is no wrong.

R. Lord, it is good to give thanks to you.

II Reading: A reading from the second letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians 5:6-10

Brothers and sisters: We are always courageous, although we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight. Yet we are courageous, and we would rather leave the body and go home to the Lord. Therefore, we aspire to please him, whether we are at home or away. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may receive recompense, according to what he did in the body, whether good or evil. **(The Word of the Lord / Thanks be to God)**

Commentary: St. Paul was not afraid of death because he was confident of spending eternity with Christ. For those who believe in Christ, death is only a prelude to eternal life with God. We will continue to live and for that we should walk by faith and not by sight. Walking by faith means living life in light of eternal consequences. To walk by faith is to fear God more than man; to obey the Bible even when it conflicts with man's commands; to trust God in every circumstance; and to believe God rewards those who seek Him, regardless of who says otherwise. It requires faith to live this way because we cannot see, hear, or touch anything spiritual. When we base our lives on the truth of God's Word, rather than on the popular philosophy of our day, we are going against our natural inclinations. Our natural instinct may be to hoard money, but walking by faith says we should give to those in need. To walk by faith requires that we tune our hearts to the voice of the Holy Spirit and the truth of His Word. We choose to live according to what God reveals to us, rather than trust our own understanding.

Gospel Reading: A reading from the Holy Gospel according to St. Mark 4:26-34

Jesus said to the crowds: "This is how it is with the kingdom of God; it is as if a man were to scatter seed on the land and would sleep and rise night and day and through it all the seed would sprout and grow, he knows not how. Of its own accord the land yields fruit, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. And when the grain is ripe, he wields the sickle at once, for the harvest has come." He said, "To what shall we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable can we use for it? It is like a mustard seed that, when it is sown in the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on the earth. But once it is sown, it springs up and becomes the largest of plants and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the sky can dwell in its shade." With many such parables he spoke the word to them as they were able to understand it. Without parables he did not speak to them, but to his own disciples he explained everything in private. **(The Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ/ Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ)**

Meditation on the Kingdom of God: The Kingdom of God is compared to the mustard seed:

1. The first mystery of the mustard seed is that it is the smallest of all seeds on the earth. It is very small in size and it remains unnoticeable and can easily become overlooked. It is a symbol of humility. And the first message that we can learn from the mustard seed is that we need to embrace humility in our walk with our Lord and our brothers and sisters. In whatever responsibility we are placed, let us always demonstrate humility without aspiring for power, name and fame and that is how we

give glory to God and respect our brothers and sisters. 2. The second mystery of the mustard seed is that it has got the potential to become the largest plant in a garden when it is planted. Many plants and many branches grow from one plant. It means when we surrender our life to the Lord, responsibly exercising our social and ecclesial commitments, the Lord prospers our life. "So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth" 1 Cor 3:7.

Small people in the Bible: Moses, a stammerer, was chosen to deliver the Israelites from the mighty Egyptians. God used Gideon with his small army of 300 to defeat thousands of Midianites. David, a shepherd boy, took down the mighty Goliath. With only 5 loaves and two fish, Jesus fed a great multitude. Although many followed Jesus, He chose only 12 disciples as his own for furthering his kingdom mission. And those 12 simple, ordinary, poor, uneducated disciples went and proclaimed the gospel to every nook and corner of the world, sacrificing their own life. The word 'impossible' is not found in God's dictionary. Thomas Alva Edison was informed by a teacher that he was too stupid to learn anything. Albert Einstein seemed so slow and dull in the school and his parents feared that he was mentally deficient. But we know who they are and what they have contributed to the world. All these reveal that the greatest things start from the smallest beginnings.

Jesus is the kingdom of God: Dr. R.C. Trench, an Irish pastor in the 1800s, wrote these words concerning God's Kingdom: "The Son of man was born in obscurity and grew up in a despised province. He did not appear in public until his thirtieth year; then taught for only three years in neighboring villages, and occasionally in Jerusalem. He had only a few followers, chiefly among the poor and unlearned. Then falling into the hands of His enemies, He died a shameful death on a cross. Thus was the commencement of the Kingdom of God."

The phrase 'kingdom of God' comes more than 80 times in the gospels alone. Jesus uses many parables to speak about the kingdom of God. While teaching his disciples to pray, he asked them to pray, "Thy kingdom come". What is the kingdom of God? Jesus is the kingdom of God in bodily form. Jesus as a grain of wheat fell to the ground, died, buried, rose and ascended into heaven and produced fruit. The seed first must be planted in order to germinate, take root and grow and produce fruit. The seed of our Christian faith lies dormant within each of us through the sacrament of Baptism, Eucharist and Confirmation. We need to permit the Lord to nurture it with the power of the Holy Spirit, Holy Scripture, the Holy Eucharist, the sacraments and daily and communal prayers.

Just feed one: Let us look for opportunities to scatter the seed wherever possible and the growth is up to God. Let us take small initiatives wherever possible. They can do something beyond our understanding and calculation. We pledge our money to the church and charitable purposes. This is how we sow seeds of faith and charity. St. Mother Teresa says, "If you can't feed a hundred people, then feed just one". We are called to do something and not everything.

Possible Venues to plant kingdom seeds: When we deeply care for each other and build bridges of fellowship and relationship, we plant kingdom seeds. When we visit homes of the deceased ones and offer comfort and healing, we see a glimpse of the Kingdom of God. When married couples come forward to help prepare engaged couples for marriage, When the Eucharistic ministers to the elderly and the homebound visit them and give them Holy Communion, When our liturgical and music ministers work so hard to provide beautiful liturgies, When our pro-life ministers work to protect life at all stages, When our religious education ministers assist parents in building a solid foundation of faith for their children, When the members of the knights of Columbus and St. Vincent De Paul Society bring assistance to families in need of financial assistance, food or clothing, When the Legion of Mary people come together for prayer and visit the nursing homes, when the other various prayer groups in the parish community exercise their commitment sincerely, When Parents and teachers plant seeds of Christian values, responsible freedom, piety and respect in the minds of their children and students then we see a glimpse of the kingdom of God. There are many venues and opportunities to plant the seeds of the kingdom of God. It is up to us. How committed I am personally to my Lord? To my family? To my parish family? To my universal church family?

Grab kind opportunities: Our Life is short but the opportunities are many. The history of the church has shown Jesus' Parable of the Mustard Seed to be true. The church has experienced an explosive rate of growth through the centuries. It is found worldwide and is a source of sustenance and shelter for all who seek its blessing. In spite of persecution and repeated attempts to stamp it out, the church has flourished. Today God's word encourages us to understand the mystery and beauty of his kingdom. Jesus chose very ordinary people and made them extra ordinary people because of their surrender to him. When the Lord calls us to serve, we must not think we have nothing or very little to offer. The Lord is very much delighted with the little that we have. Because "He can write straight even in crooked lines". Hence let us joyfully offer our times, talents, resources and whatever small or big we have to the Lord and His mystical body, the church.

Concluding Prayer: Loving Father, open our eyes to see You working around us and in us. Nothing happens by accident. You orchestrate every day of our life. Allow us to see your hand in the mundane. Help us to trust in what we cannot see, and believe in Your invisible presence. Thank you for your faithfulness even in our faithlessness. Thank you for sending your divine Son Jesus to save us. We want to encounter You in ways that build our ability to trust you and believe that Your word is true. Connect us with people who can strengthen and encourage our faith. Supply what is lacking in our faith. Strengthen our belief in You that we may be able to do everything we are called to do. Father, You will never forsake us or leave us. To have You at our side gives us the ability to face whatever comes. Help us to keep our faith in You despite our circumstances, because You are with us. Teach us to walk by faith in you and not by sight at the world.