

Sunday, June 13, 2021

*The Parables of the Kingdom of God
The Kingdom is like a seed
Mark 4: 26-34*

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus, send us your Spirit, to open the Scriptures for us in the same way that you opened them for the disciples on the road to Emmaus. With the light of the Word, written in the Bible, you helped them to discover the presence of God in the terrible events of your condemnation and crucifixion. Thus, the cross, that seemed to be the end of all hope, could be seen by them as the source of life and resurrection.

Create in us the silence that will enable us to listen to your voice in creation and in Scripture, in the events of life and in other people, especially in the poor and the suffering. May your Word direct us so that we too, just like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, may experience the power of your resurrection and be witnesses for others of the truth that you are alive and that you live in our midst, as the source of fraternity, peace, and justice. We ask this of you, Jesus, Son of Mary, who have revealed the Father to us and have sent us your Holy Spirit. Amen.

Reading

A division of the text that will help our understanding

- Mk 4: 26-29: The parable of the seed that springs up on its own
- Mk 4: 30-32: The parable of the grain of mustard
- Mk 4: 33-34: The conclusion regarding parables.

The Text: Mk 4: 26-34

He also said, "The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come."

He also said, "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade."

With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples.

A Moment of Prayerful Silence

so that the Word of God may enter and enlighten our lives.

Questions

to help us in our prayer and meditation

- What point struck you most? Why?
- Jesus did not explain the parables. He told the stories and awakened the imagination in his listeners and their reflection on what they discovered. What have you discovered in the parables?
- The purpose of these words is to make life transparent. Over the years, has your life become more transparent, or has the opposite happened?

Look More Deeply at the Theme

a) For a better understanding

Why Jesus taught through parables: Jesus recounted many parables. All of them are taken from the life of the people. In this way he helped people to discover the things of God in everyday life, as life becomes more transparent, because the extraordinary things of God are hidden in the ordinary and common things of everyday life. The people could understand the things of life. The parables provide the key that opens that life and finds the signs of God in it.

Through the parables, Jesus helped the people to see the mysterious presence of the Kingdom in the things of life. A parable is a comparison. Jesus used the known and obvious things of life to help to explain the invisible and unknown things of the Kingdom of God. For example, the people of Galilee understood when someone talked about seeds, land, rain, sunshine, salt, flowers, fish, harvest etc., Jesus used all these things that the people knew very well, in his parables, to help to explain the mystery of the Kingdom.

The parable of the sower is a portrait of a farmer's life. At that time, it was hard to make a living from farming. The land was full of stones. There were many rough plants, not a lot of rain, and a strong sun. As well as that, often, the people in order to take shortcuts walked across the land and trampled on the plants (Mk 2,23). Despite all that, every year the farmer would plant, trusting in the power of the seed and in the generosity of nature.

A parable doesn't say everything, but induces a person to think and make discoveries, beginning with the experience the listeners have of the seed. This is not a neatly packaged doctrine that arrives all ready to be taught and embellished. The parable does not provide water in a bottle, but rather, leads people to the source. A farmer, listening, would say, "Seed in the ground, I know what that is, but Jesus is saying that this has something to do with the Kingdom of God! What could that be?" It's not difficult to imagine the long conversations that might follow with the crowd. The parable moves with the people and gets them to listen to nature and to think about life.

b) Commentary on the text

It is wonderful to see Jesus, again and again, looking at life and at what's happening around him, for things and images that might help the people to detect and to experience the presence of the Kingdom. In today's Gospel, again, he tells two short stories about things that happen every day in our lives: The story of the seed that grows, all on its own, and the story of the tiny mustard that grows to be so big."

- *The story of the seed that grows all on its own*

The farmer who plants the seed knows the process: first the seed, then the green shoot, the leaf, the ear and the grain. The farmer knows how to wait and will not cut the stalk before it is ripe, but he does not know from where the power comes for the soil, the rain, the sun and the seed to make a seed turn into fruit. That's what the Kingdom of God is like. It's a process. There are stages and points of growth. It takes time and happens in time. The fruit comes at the right time but no one can explain its mysterious power. No one is its master!. Only God!

- *The story of the tiny mustard seed that turns into something very big*

The mustard seed is small, but it grows, to the point where the birds can make their nests in its branches. That's what the Kingdom is like. It begins as something very small, it grows and spreads its branches. The parable does not say who the birds are. The answer to that question will come later in the Gospel. The text suggests that it refers to the pagans who will not be able to get into the community and be sharers in the Kingdom.

Jesus explained the parable to his disciples

In the house, when they were on their own with Jesus, the disciples want to know what the parable means. They do not understand it. Jesus is astonished by their failure to understand (Mk 4:13) and at that point responds in a way that is difficult and mysterious. He says to his disciples, "To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside, everything comes in parables; in order that 'they may indeed look, but not perceive, and may indeed listen, but not understand; so that they may not turn again and be forgiven.'" (Mk 4:11-12) This makes the people wonder, What use is the parable then? Is it to make things clear or to hide them? Perhaps Jesus uses parables so that people will go on living in ignorance and not become converted? Certainly not!. Today's Gospel says that, "with many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it" (Mk 4:33)

The parable reveals and hides at the same time! It reveals, to those who have become attuned, who accept Jesus, the Servant Messiah. It hides, from those who insist on seeing him as Messiah, mighty King. These see the images of the parable but they do not grasp their meaning.

Prayer - Psalm 96

Tell of his salvation from day to day

O sing to the Lord a new song;
sing to the Lord, all the earth. Sing to the Lord, bless his name;
tell of his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the nations,
his marvelous works among all the peoples. For great is the Lord, and greatly to be
praised; he is to be revered above all gods.

For all the gods of the peoples are idols, but the Lord made the heavens.
Honor and majesty are before him; strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.
Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.

Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; bring an offering, and come into his courts.
Worship the Lord in holy splendor; tremble before him, all the earth.
Say among the nations, "The Lord is king! The world is firmly established;
it shall never be moved.

He will judge the peoples with equity. "Let the heavens be glad,
and let the earth rejoice;
let the sea roar, and all that fills it;
let the field exult, and everything in it.

Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy before the Lord; for he is coming,
for he is coming to judge the earth.
He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with his truth.

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, we give you thanks for your word that has helped us to see more clearly what is the will of the Father. Let your Spirit enlighten our actions and give us the strength to be able to do what your word had allowed us to see. Let us, like Mary your Mother, not just listen to the your Word, but also to put it into practice. You live and reign with the Father, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, forever and ever. Amen

Monday, June 14, 2021

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Almighty God,
our hope and our strength, without you we falter.
Help us to follow Christ and to live according to your will.
Who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading - Matthew 5: 38-42

Jesus said to his disciples: 'You have heard how it was said: Eye for eye and tooth for tooth. But I say this to you: offer no resistance to the wicked. On the contrary, if anyone hits you on the right cheek, offer him the other as well; if someone wishes to go to law with you to get your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone requires you to go one mile, go two miles with him. Give to anyone who asks you, and if anyone wants to borrow, do not turn away.

Reflection

Today's Gospel forms part of a small literary unit which goes from Mt 5: 17 to Mt 5: 48, in which is described how to pass from the ancient justice of the Pharisees (Mt 5: 20) to