

## 11th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Trinity III

Patience is a virtue we all struggle with, in our fast-moving post-modern world. Our brains are being hard-wired to be constantly stimulated and engaged. Those grown up with smart screens particularly struggle with slowing down and patience. Anxiety and depression are so common among the younger generation and they have very little patience, some don't even know what it is! Instant gratification is the post-modern value everyone is after. **I want it and I want it now is the cry!** The inevitable frustration of this unsustainable instant gratification is a cause of several mental illnesses we see in society today, including anxiety and depression.

Today's readings speak of the laws of growth using agricultural images. We would love to be able to plant a seed today and have a magnificent tree tomorrow but that is not possible. It will take many years for the tree to grow to its full height. Likewise, our faith journey, the healing of our bodies and mind, and mind life journey, the growth of the Church, and the establishment of the kingdom of God take its own sweet time, no matter how impatient we feel, good things always take a good amount of time to cook up.

Readings set before us this morning speak of the patience of God in establishing his kingdom, and Jesus attempts to communicate this elusive concept of the kingdom of God, through symbol and image rather than systemic definition. The kingdom of God means not a worldly political entity but a regime or ethos that determines how things are run. The scholars argue that the Greek word '*Basileia*' means 'reign' more than 'kingdom'. So Jesus is speaking about the Reign of God, the Rule of God that is being established particularly with his saving work on earth.

The rule of God is best approached through its negative counterpart, the rule of Satan that it is displacing. The presupposition is that the world, including Israel, has fallen into a state of alienation from God. This means that humans are subjected to demonic rule, resulting in all kinds of evil, violence, and dehumanization, as we continue to see in human history.

In the centuries leading up to the time of Jesus, faithful Jews interpreted key Old Testament Prophecies, as pointing to a coming intervention of God that would break the grip of the demonic in human affairs and replace it with the liberating reign of God. We heard in last Sunday's Sermon about the Demonic at work in the ancient Aztec Empire with its human sacrifices, that went on for days. Israel too, hoped for a Divine Intervention, to save them from the Oppression of the Roman Empire, this belief often included an ideal ruler in David's line "*the Messiah*", who would free God's people from foreign domination, and establish a messianic era of righteousness, prosperity and of peace.

This was the conventional hope for the Kingdom that the disciples of Jesus and the crowds to whom he preached would have shared. For Jesus, however, the essence of the Kingdom was not the gaining of political freedom or prosperity – at least not in the first instance. The essence of the Kingdom was a renewed relationship with God, involving an unconditional offer of forgiveness and familial intimacy with God ("Our Father"). Although the outward aspects of the Kingdom remained something for the future, these essential features were presently available through repentance and faith. Hence the core "good news" proclaimed by Jesus: "*The Rule of God is at hand; repent and believe the good news*" (Mark 1:15).

Most of Jesus' parables, including the two featured in today's Gospel, address these differences between the Kingdom as proclaimed by Jesus and the wider expectations of the crowds.

In the parable of the Seed Growing Secretly, once the landowner has sown the seed he simply lets it be. He goes about his life, confident that the soil will work a growth process without any intervention on his part. Only when he sees the grain is ripe, does he move to put in the sickle for harvest. Likewise, Jesus has sown the "seed" of the Kingdom in his preaching. Then follows a long period when nothing seems to be happening, at least nothing visible or dramatic. But all the while growth is taking place and a time for the harvest will arrive.

This parable makes its hearers think of God in terms of the man who sowed the seed and then sat back, allowing the growth process to run its unseen course. At present, the Kingdom is taking hold and quietly growing in the "soil" of receptive and patient human hearts. God allows that to happen, delaying the "harvest" until the "fruit" is ripe. The absence of visible and dramatic signs does not mean that the Kingdom is not already at work; it is at work, producing "fruit" that will be "harvested" in God's good time.

The small parable of the Mustard Seed addresses the present insignificance of the Reign of God from a fresh aspect. Here the point lies in the contrast between tiny beginnings and the vast scale of what will result in the end. While derived from tiny seeds, mustard bushes grow vigorously and can take over vegetable gardens. It is worth noting that the phrase 'birds of the air' was a traditional Jewish expression for the Gentiles, all the non-Jews. In today's first reading, for example, the prophet Ezekial speaks of the universal openness of God's welcome in the image of the tree where all birds can find a resting place. Similarly in Jesus' teaching: the kingdom of God is open to all peoples. The

greatness of the kingdom, the rule of God, which grows from such a small beginning, is for the benefit of all peoples; it is not the exclusive domain of any one flock.

When we think of the small beginning of Jesus' ministry in Galilee to the spread of his message throughout the world, we can appreciate the vast growth that has taken place in history within his Church. The seed that Jesus planted has indeed grown: who could have guessed in Galilee in 27 AD what would emerge from the preaching of a young Rabbi from tiny Nazareth? From small beginnings, Jesus' attention to the afflicted and the outcast, his quiet transformations, and his unusual company of followers, there did indeed arise the greatness of the kingdom of God. God's work continues, not only in Christian churches but in peoples and places unknown and unrecognized by us. God's reign and rule happen in so many ways. His kingdom grows of its own accord.

This doesn't mean that we can be complacent, but it does save us from cynicism and despair. God continues to invite each of us to play our little part in his majestic kingdom, we should not be discouraged by the littleness of our contribution or the humility of our gifts. When things start small, they can fly under the radar while they gain strength and seriousness, also those involved can be tested and tried. So we need to be patient and embrace the small invitations to work for the kingdom of God.

We have great hope and reason to rejoice in God's work, that his kingdom still attracts and welcomes so many different peoples. We are all part of this kingdom, and we should not be surprised if we seem to be sharing the shade with some really weird and strange birds! Let us continue to have long patience, deep perseverance and unwavering hope as we continue to work for the KINGDOM of GOD which will embrace the whole of creation.