

Praying for Reign
June 13, 2021, Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time
Gospel of Mark 4:26-34
Fr. Brad

When we think about the Kingdom of God, we naturally may think about a place, about Heaven - - not only a place, but a place in the future after we die. But the Kingdom of God might be better served using the language, '*Reign of God*' because it is about a person (God) and the reign of God in our hearts - - and that is an **earthly reality** as well as a **heavenly one**. Yes, and even in our loneliness and suffering in this world, the Kingdom of God is more present than we think.

So why a *mustard seed* to describe the Kingdom of God? There is something about its smallness, its unassumingness, how it grows, not into a towering tree but a bush taller than a human person, with a stem about an inch thick. The planting of a mustard seed may seem very unassuming and small and ordinary, not seeming worthy of much attention maybe not even noticeable at first. It is interesting that Jesus chose a most humble plant to illustrate the grand theme of the kingdom of God.

Perhaps this is meant to teach us that the long-expected intervention of the reign of God shows itself in ways that are more ordinary and more present than we may think. And it begins in something as simple and everyday like table fellowship.

It is up to us to allow this mustard seed to be sown and grown in our hearts and minds. It may be easily overlooked. It takes humility on our part, and much patience to notice it and give it space. And **our** humility - - like the farmer's with the seeds, - - means waiting, or in other words, being patient.

And we must be ready in anticipation of something greater than ourselves, something the Spirit bestows. It is in God's initiative through the Holy Spirit that the seeds get planted in our souls and quietly begin their growth. Our job is to prepare the land, the soil for that growth.

Once planted, the seed of God's word will exhibit a divine power that produces more than human endeavour could ever hope to achieve: a community of forgiveness and justice that we could never hope to muster on our own power. The image of the farmer going about his life, sleeping and rising night and day, emphasizes the divine initiative in this process. If humans could only trust God fully instead of relying upon themselves, unimaginable success would result.

And these seeds, once planted, must grow at their own rate. We cannot measure the growth of love or faith or quantify it in anyway. I can't say for example, '*okay all you with lots of faith gather in this side of the room and all you with a medium amount move over here, and those with just a little faith meet over there.*' How does anybody determine that and what is the criterion? (Or how about very Holy, medium Holy, and only a little Holy) - - seems more than a little hard to quantify.

The reign of God, this kingdom need not measure well in isolated moments. It is a living growing reality. We cannot take a picture of it - - it is always unfolding. Life is slow and subtle. Love takes time to show and grow. In life, little acts count. In fact, life is a long parade of seemingly inconsequential moments that in reality is a process of cultivating

and nurturing the kingdom of God - - the reign of God within our hearts. It is the journey into deeper holiness. And day to day we don't really notice it much.

Think of children, when we haven't seen them for awhile, how when we see them again, have grown noticeably. Parents, on the other hand, and others who see them everyday, don't notice this growth as easily.

So when we ask the question, 'have we made progress in our spiritual lives?', it may be hard to answer because we are almost never aware of it. Only when we look back and review, perhaps through journaling or reflecting and examining our lives, that we start to see the growth, the maturing.

Do you ever notice how the fears and anxieties around something that went on last year, have slowly dissipated or dissolved? Has not God been involved in resolution or calming of those fears and anxieties?

A daily examination of our awareness can take us more deeply into the reality of our inward experience and enhance our lives. In other words, with all the worries that come up when we let the daily fears and anxieties of external thoughts and activities get to us, be sure to review the events and activities later, through the eyes of your faith and open your perspective up to what God might be doing in those situations. Then note how things look different through the lens of faith.

I can think of examples in my life where, at the time of the seeming catastrophe, I did not know where God was in all of it. I was at a loss for understanding what was going on. But as time went by, I would look back and find that, not only were those fears unfounded, but through the eyes of faith, I could see how God was indeed after all, present in those events and I was being looked after in ways I was completely oblivious to at the time. Through this inward turn, (journaling, self examination and reflecting on our daily life), we consciously give our concerns and ourselves back to God.

Remember Mother Teresa's famous words about measuring her own success:
"I am not called to be successful, I am called to be faithful. We help with the sowing; God does the growing."

So in our call as disciples to show love through our words, and actions, don't assume anything is too trivial. Allow His work to be accomplished through you, without over thinking or over analysing, and allow His ways to grow within you, even though much may happen beyond what you are consciously aware of at the time. Perhaps down the road you will come to recognize just how intimately present and involved God really was during those terribly trying times in your life and still is. We just need to trust and be patient like the farmer who, once the seed is planted, simply allows God's work to be accomplished and await with anticipation, the harvest.

And if we are going through a difficult time right now, take note, the Kingdom of God is at hand. Amen.