

June 17, 2018  
11th Sunday in Ordinary Time  
Mark 4:26-34

[Jesus said to the crowd] "This is how it is with the kingdom of God; it is as if a man was to scatter seed on the land and would sleep and rise night and day and 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.

#### Background:

The gospel text for today is composed of two short parables that draw on the common experience of people of the day. Both parables reflect the experience of planting seeds, and how they develop into mature plants. Most of us would consider their undertraining to be very primitive. But the reality for them and for us how plants grow from seeds to a mature plant is still very much a mystery. But we all know that the farmers must do their part - weeding, fertilizing, and watering. The fact that the farmer is doing none of these things in the first parable would be immediately noticed.

Agriculture was also one of the places where people of Jesus' time could be surprised by abundance. For the most part, people believed that everything had already been distributed by God, and there was no more where that had come from. If a person suddenly had more of almost anything than they had the day before, it was assumed that they had gotten it by some improper means.

Thus, the woman who finds her lost coin throws a lavish party to celebrate finding the coin. She makes her discovery public, warding off suspicion and speculations about how she got the coin. It is also much less likely that neighbors will be critical if they have enjoyed a portion of its fruit.

But farming was one of the places where the surprise of abundance might be experienced without the presumption of foul play. At the same time there was also an understanding that if one did have more than they needed for their survival, the abundance was to be shared with those in need. Thus the familiar parable of the farmer who thought he would build larger storage bins for an abundant harvest and live off his surplus for years in the future. He died enjoying neither the abundant harvest, nor the good reputation he could have had by sharing the abundance with those in need. Instead, when he died, a different reputation continued on after his death.

#### Reflection Questions:

1. When I think of people who spend their lives as farmers...
2. The reign of God is like...
3. When I think of my experience of the mystery of the reign God...
4. When I think about watching a seed grow into a large bush or a tree...
5. When I consider Jesus explaining the meaning of the parable to the disciples...
6. Can you take some time to talk to God about his use of farming parables, or your sense of the realm of God unfolding around you, or whatever arose in you as you considered these two parables?

The gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel. The excerpts from the Sunday readings are prepared by Joe Thiel. To be added to the distribution list, send your name and email address to [annemarie.lom@gmail.com](mailto:annemarie.lom@gmail.com)

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### **Excerpts from the readings for June 17, 2018, the Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time**

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.

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

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.

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.

**Excerpts from Ezekiel 17:22-24; Psalm 92:2-3, 13-16; 2 Corinthians 5:6-10; and Mark 4:26-34**