

Sunday June 13th, 2021, The Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time Year 'B'

Good Morning from St. Bernadette's.

I hope everyone is keeping safe and well, and following all the guidance we receive to overcome these strange times, and continuing to pray for all our needs at this time.

And I hope you are all enjoying the beautiful sunshine this glorious weekend. And we have, in our Gospel, two glorious Parables to think about!

We often call the first parable in today's Gospel, Mark 4:26-34), 'The Seed Growing Secretly' - speaking, as it does, about the Kingdom of God, slowly growing, almost unnoticeably, all the time. But when I was studying in Rome, where all our lectures were in Italian, the parable was titled, 'Il Contadino qui aspetta', 'The Farmer who Waits'. It's the same parable, but the two titles each give a different emphasis - the first marvelling at the work and growth of the Kingdom of God, the second calling us not to despair or grow impatient if we see little signs of the Kingdom of God around us.

In today's Gospel Jesus first speaks of how the kingdom of God grows through the activity of providence, like seed scattered on the land. Although people may sow and scatter the seed, it is not they who enable the seed to grow in the earth, but God - and thus we must trust in him for the Kingdom of Heaven to grow. Yes, there are lots of things we can do, of course, but patient trust in the power of God is paramount. Jesus goes on - in the second parable - to compare the kingdom of heaven to a mustard seed, which, though he calls it 'the smallest of all the seeds on earth', grows into the largest shrub that exists. He says that the kingdom of God is like the small mustard seed, which, once it has grown to maturity, will have 'the birds of the air' coming to find shelter in its shade. So the nations of the world will be gathered together into the kingdom - another reminder to us that the Gospel was not just for the Jews, but for the gentiles, for all people to hear. Together the two parables speak about the growth of the Kingdom of God, but they reminded us it might have small beginnings, which we might have a part in, and the need to persevere when times seem dark or slow, as with the farmer in the first parable.

There are times when we might feel discouraged by the slow growth or even apparent decline of the kingdom of God throughout the church and the world. In the West, for example, there are whole areas of peoples and life that have become completely secular in outlook - and the Church has often seemed to be the last to speak about such things. If we despair about this, however, we must always remember that the growth of God's kingdom does not depend on us alone. It is God who is the sower; and it is God's providence, not our efforts alone, that enables the kingdom to grow. On our own it's easy for us

to feel dispirited, disillusioned, or simply confused, hence more than ever we need to trust in God and in his Church, actively seeking the Kingdom, but also making every effort to let it shine in the world. Trust is definitely what we need at the moment, to be able to open St. Bernadette's safely and securely so that all people can feel safe and secure under our roof: the time for prayer is now, and the time for further action will come very soon, God willing. There have been a few 'baby steps' recently, but hopefully there are more to come as we look forward to the 'new normality.'

Even if the kingdom may have the appearance of being small and insignificant, even we really have experienced such extraordinary times of the last eighteen months, Jesus tells us that like the mustard seed the Kingdom, and the Church, will eventually become large and will contain people from all the nations of the world. This is not a false hope – it is the words of Jesus. Yes of course we are called to action in the name of the Kingdom of God. But sometimes our greatest action is most simple to patiently trust and hope in the providence of God, and that in turn can infuse us with courage and determination to spur us on to further action, for Christ, his Gospel, and his Church.

God, we can hold many tiny seeds in our hand.

We see smallness, weakness, insignificance.

You see potential, growth, significance.

Tiny seeds grow by your power into huge trees.

They provide food for hungry and homes for birds.

From the darkness of the earth

springs forth your life, your harvest.

Your Kingdom is like a tiny seed.

When we look at your church, and our own lives,

we see smallness, weakness, insignificance.

You see potential, growth, significance.

Give us eyes of faith and willing hands to see your Kingdom grow in us.

May we feed the hungry with food and the bread of life,

welcome the homeless into your family,

and gather the harvest you love has provided.

In Christ's name and the power of the Spirit

we commit our lives to you again. Amen.

'We Plough the Seeds and Scatter' seems to be a most appropriate hymn for today's Gospel, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ccVEjKFkAV4> although, even whilst being *the* Harvest hymn, is not one we often sing in our Catholic Churches. So if you are not so sure of that one, how about 'All Things Bright and Beautiful' <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IPMA5I3-0Jw> Gosh, where would be have been without Songs of Praise this year?

This is a rather lovely poem called 'The Old Farmer's Prayer'.

*Time just keeps moving on
Many years have come and gone
But I grow older without regret
My hopes are in what may come yet.
On the farm I work each day
This is where I wish to stay
I watch the seeds each season sprout
From the soil as the plants rise out.
I study Nature and I learn
To know the earth and feel her turn
I love her dearly and all the seasons
For I have learned her secret reasons.
All that will live is in the bosom of Earth
She is the loving mother of all birth
But all that lives must pass away
And go back again to her someday.
My life too will pass from Earth
But do not grieve, I say, there will be other birth
When my body is old and all spent
And my soul to Heaven has went.
Please compost and spread me on this plain
So my body Mother Earth can claim
That is where I wish to be
Then Nature can nourish new life with me.
So do not for me grieve and weep
I did not leave, I only sleep
I am with the soil here below
Where I can nourish life of beauty and glow.
Here I can help the falling rain
Grow golden fields of ripening grain
From here I can join the winds that blow
And meet the softly falling snow.
Here I can help the sun's warming light
Grow food for birds of gliding flight
I can be in the beautiful flowers of spring
And in every other lovely thing.*

So do not for me weep and cry

I am here, I do not die.

Over in Australia my sister and the family seem to be having an interesting weekend. First of all they went wildlife hunting by the lake, checking out the kangaroos, as you might expect, I guess. Then, perhaps less expected, they took themselves off to an exhibition of clothes by the designer Mary Quant, and my sister was happy to note that, as you can just see at the bottom of the information plaque, many of the hats were made back up in our old homestead of Cleator in West Cumbria, at the Kangol factory which we used to know very well indeed, just down the road from us, opposite our Church, St. Mary's! You can take the girl out of Cleator, but the berets will always follow you. Or something like that.

A farmer was milking his cow. He was just starting to get a good rhythm going when a bug flew into the barn and started circling his head. Suddenly, the bug flew into the cow's ear. The farmer didn't think much about it, until the bug squirted out into his bucket. It went in one ear and out the udder. And now I'll leave.

Enjoy the rest of the weekend!

And remember, St. Bernadette's is not closed. We're just doing things differently for a while, until we are allowed to gather together once more, more stronger, more faithful, more loving, more creative, and more grateful for the amazing community that is St. Bernadette's.

With love and faith in Jesus.

Fr. P.