

Homily 11th Sunday Ordinary Time 2024

“Good things come in small parcels” is an expression usually used in Scotland in defence of a person’s lack of height. St Mark in today’s Gospel Jesus tells the parable of the Growing Seed and how slowly and silently, almost unnoticed the seed grows:

‘first the shoot, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. And when the crop is ready, the farmer loses no time: he starts to reap because the harvest has come.’ He also tells the parable of The Mustard Seed. Jesus explains how the mustard seed is the smallest of seeds but grows into one of the largest shrubs where all the birds of the air come to rest and shelter.

So what is a parable and what are the key meanings of these two parables? A parable is put simply, a story taken from a real-life situation with ONE key message the details emphasising the key message. The two parables above refer specifically to the Kingdom of God. Jesus thus explains how God’s Kingdom will be established. Like the growing seed The Kingdom will, despite the barriers put in its way, grow quietly and gradually and largely ignored by most people. The mustard seed shows that from very small beginnings, in a largely insignificant part of the Middle East and in unimportant towns such as Bethlehem (‘the least of the towns of Judah.’) and Nazareth (‘What good can come out of Nazareth’), God’s Kingdom will grow and spread throughout the world.

In today’s First Reading from Ezekiel in 7th Century BC authoritatively proclaims the eventual immensity of The Kingdom of God:

“The Lord says this:

‘From the top of the cedar,
from the highest branch I will take a shoot
and plant it myself on a very high mountain.
I will plant it on the high mountain of Israel.
It will sprout branches and bear fruit,
and become a noble cedar.
Every kind of bird will live beneath it,
every winged creature rest in the shade of its branches.
And every tree of the field will learn that I, the Lord, am the one
who stunts tall trees and makes the low ones grow,
who withers green trees and makes the withered green.
I, the Lord, have spoken, and I will do it.’ “

The veracity of Ezekial’s prophecy and the truth of Jesus’ parables is obvious today. One of our Bible Study Group members said of Lourdes, “When you see the hundreds and thousands of pilgrims you realise that you are not alone in your faith.” Indeed, the Kingdom of God, already present on earth but still to be perfected, is represented by millions of Christians throughout the world who daily strive to live out Jesus’ Mission to the poor, the homeless, the sick, the blind, the imprisoned, the marginalised and the downtrodden.

Yes it’s true, ‘very good things come in very small parcels.’