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11th Ordinary Sunday - 13 June 2021

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13 June 2021

Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reflection by Gerard Moore

Introduction

Our first reading and the Gospel bring to us the challenge to step back and allow God to build the reign of God. Within this is the appreciation of the unexpected ways in which the divine acts, with a clear preference by God for the weak and the withered. Paul's words to the Corinthians have a different focus, concentrating on our responsibility to aspire to please God in proper conduct modelled on the final judgement.

Collect of the Sunday

Despite our membership of the body of Christ, we Christians remain in a state of weakness, prone to disobedience. Any actions we take independent of God inevitably lead us to death, to a wretched existence outside of God, grace and goodness. Acknowledging our inconstancy and feebleness, we place our hope in God. We look to God as the source of our strength, courage and consolation, through which comes help, strengthening and restoration. God's commandments have their part to play in this, directing us towards authentic love of God and neighbour, guiding our wills and actions so that they may be pleasing to God.

The collect also comments on the nature of Christian obedience. Our obedience is only pleasing to God when it involves both freely willing God's precepts and putting them into effect. Such salutary compliance can only come about with God's help.

Penitential Act

Use one of the *Roman Missal* texts or this optional litany form:

Lord Jesus, you call us to walk by faith. Lord, have mercy.
You are the seed that forms the Kingdom of God. Christ, have mercy.
You show us the grace of the Father. Lord, have mercy.

First Reading

Ezekiel 17:22-24

The prophet brings us that God is at work amongst us, providing for all, yet bypassing the mighty while calling the weak to grow and to bloom

Second Reading

2 Corinthians 5:6-10

Paul taps into our sense of restlessness as human beings yet he reminds us that our actions here and now determine the quality of our presence in Christ when all things are fulfilled.

Gospel Reading

Mark 4:26-34

Mark gives us a parable with the unmistakable message that God is building the reign of God even while we speak.

Reflection

The reading from the prophet Ezekiel and the passage from the Gospel of Mark offer a difficult challenge for preachers. It is not that their message is obtuse. Rather it is that their message is something of a rebuke to homilies and homilists alike. Let me unpack this before you decide not to read any further!

The prophet is unequivocal. The building of the community that rests in the shade of the great cedar is God's work and God's work alone. It is God who plants, and though unspoken, it is God who tends. The result is a fruitful majestic cedar. It is God's work from start to finish.

Yet the divine gardening has a particular quality. It does not begin with the mighty tree but with a tender shoot. It is an inauspicious beginning. The shoot is planted in the high and lofty mountains, and indeed cedars seem to be trees of the mountains. Yet deep in the recesses of Israel's religious imagination is the memory that the Lord was known as a God of the mountains, and in pantheistic times was understood to dwell in the mountains. The shoot may be planted in what could be seen as a hostile environment, but there is a sense that it is planted within the dwelling place of God.

What follows then is more troubling. As the cedar takes root and transforms into a majestic fruit bearing tree, so it is attractive to every winged creature. The bounty of the tree is not limited but extends across creation. God's work may be for God's people but it is also for all God's creation. The tree provides shade for all winged creatures.

But it is also a rebuke to the other trees. The Lord does not necessarily favour the high trees. In what will later be echoed in Mary's Magnificat (Lk 1:46-55) the high trees are brought low, the lowly lifted high, the withered tree turns green, and blooms with life. As if to add to the tension, the reading closes with the power of the word of God: *as I have spoken, so shall I do!*

And so the challenge for the preachers. Giving a Sunday homily is an institutional action, carried out by an authorized person within the rites of the Mass. It is to be amongst the high trees, the tall cedars. Yet these are the trees that are brought low.

For Ezekiel, God is choosing something different. The word of the Lord is given root in something lowly, nurtured by God to growth. The word of the Lord is found in something withered, brought to greenery and led into bloom under the care of the divine forester.

There is a tension here, a tension felt by attentive preachers and presiders, church leaders and commentary writers too. What is our task? Perhaps it is to recognize how much of our work is God's doing and so step back from an ownership that stifles the Spirit. Further it is to not stand in the way of God's nurturing of the unlikely, the lowly, the tender shoot. And if the tender shoot takes root and grows, we need to be prepared to minister to all the birds that come to rest in the shade of the church. The fruit and shade of the cedar planted by the Lord is not only for Israel, but for all in need beyond borders and belongings.

The task of the preacher, this writer, the parishioners, is to nurture the tender root, and allow for a new blooming, an end to withering, and shade and food for many different birds. The trees we have become accustomed to may turn out to be the very ones that are to be brought low.

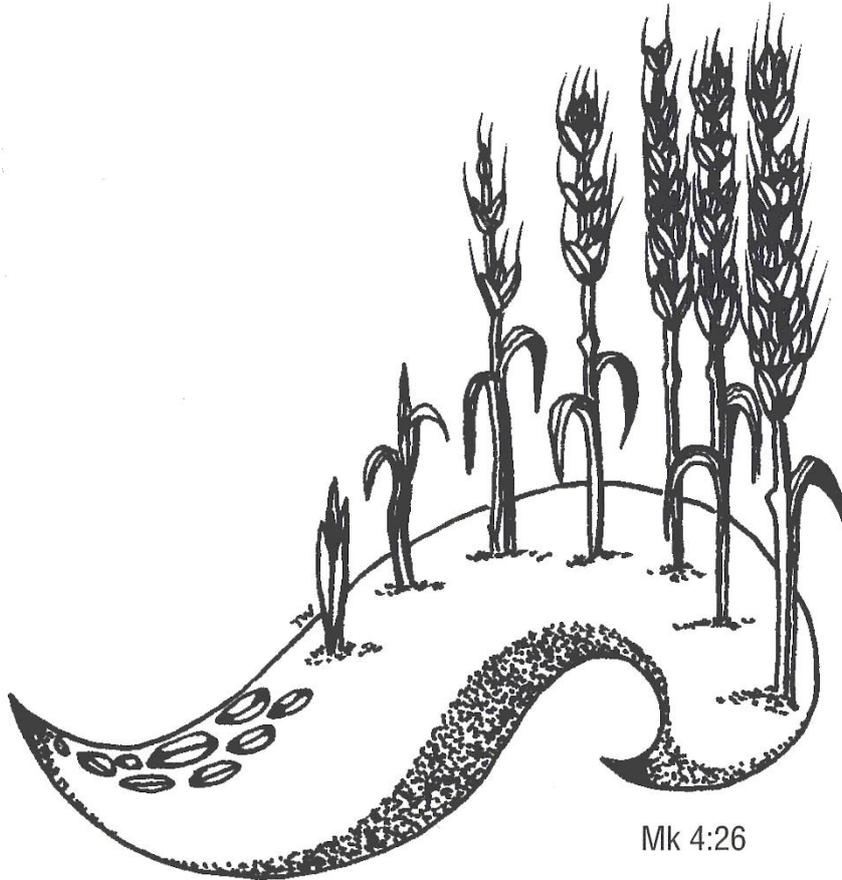
The Gospel excerpt has some of these points but not all. Mark is bringing to bear that the work of the Gospel is God's work. Behind the scenes God guides the movement from seed to growth to harvest. The farmer sows and harvests, but the processes behind are those of the divine. Furthermore, the smallest act, the smallest seed, can lead to the strongest bush with the largest branches and the most shade. Without even knowing it, we can find ourselves in the midst of the reign of God.

In this passage Mark does not have a strong anti-institutional edge, but the message of reliance on God is clear. Again, our task is to recognize the fruit, take our role, but allow the work of God to take its place. And when we see the smallest of seeds produce shade for the birds of the air, we are to understand that the reign of God is in our midst. Here is Mark's challenge: for us to have eyes open for the work of God beyond our own doing.

The tenor of the reading from Second Corinthians strikes a different note, not quite in harmony with Gospel or the prophet. It is worth being mindful of the teaching in the early church that Christ would return soon; his second coming was immanent. This allows us to see what underpinned Paul's comments. The faithful are in a difficult period, one requiring courage. But the apostle also wants to offer hope. While current prospects do not look promising, the end game is being won. Home is with the Lord, and human restlessness is a sign of our discomfort on earth as opposed to our fulfillment in heaven. However the emphasis here, unlike in our other two readings, is not on God's hidden work but on our actions here and now. Faith gives courage, but the final judgement by Christ gives a form of encouragement. What we do on earth matters, whether we are restless for that final home in the Lord or not. The quality of our lives in faith is matched by the recompense Christ bestows. Yet the recompense is a minor part of Paul's argument. The heart of it is in aspiring to please the Lord. It is important to match this with the Gospel passages of the final judgement (Mt 25: 31-46). Here the Lord is unrecognized, but present in the poor,

hungry, afflicted, thirsty and imprisoned. Taking up Paul, what we do for the poor matters. Our actions grow that cedar, that mustard tree, that is able to shelter the many types of birds of the air, while mindful that we will be called to account.

There is some jostling then between the three readings. Perhaps the action most required is to learn how to step out of the way and allow God to work freely nurturing the young cedar and growing the kingdom.



*The kingdom of
God is like this.*

Prayer of the Faithful

Introduction

Like the sower in today's Gospel, who plants a crop and waits for God's blessing, we too make our petitions to the Lord, full of confidence in the Father's abundant generosity.

Petitions

We pray for the Church, that the seed of faith may be spread throughout the world and be nourished and watered by the Word of God so that it may bear fruit in the Plenary Council.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for those who govern our nation, that they work to protect the rainforests, deserts and native bushlands of our common home, so that their beauty and environmental value may be treasured for generations yet to come.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for farmers, gardeners and those who live off the land, that they may respond generously to their harvest by sharing it with others.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for those who suffer from drought or flood, that this time of trial may bring the local community together through perseverance and hope for future blessings.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for our local parish community, may the Word of God inspire us to care for our local environment through the responsible disposal of rubbish, recycling and genuine care for all of God's creation.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for those who are ill, mentally or physically, that through the compassion of others they may find the strength and peace to continue the journey of life.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

Conclusion

Wonderful Creator, you sent your Son to draw all creation to yourself, listen to the prayer of your children today and recreate us through the power of your Spirit.

Amen.

Music selections by Alessio Loiacono and Chris deSilva

GA

Bring forth the kingdom. M. Haugen. 478
For the fruits of this creation. F. P. Green/ Welsh melody. 426
Seed, scattered and sown. D. Feiten. 195
Seek ye first. K. Lafferty. 456
Take the word of God. J. Harrison/ C. Walker. 494
Unless a grain of wheat. B. Farrell. 500
We remember. M. Haugen. 446
We walk by faith. M. Haugen. 447

AOV1

All that is hidden. B. Farrell. 127
Seek ye first. K. Lafferty. 48
Unless a grain of wheat. B. Farrell. 35
We remember. M. Haugen. 81
We walk by faith. M. Haugen. 63

AOV2

Bring forth the kingdom. M. Haugen. 4
Great is thy faithfulness. W. H. Runyon. 127

AOV4Kids

The table of God. F. O'Brien. 8
To live like Jesus. M. O'Brien/ D. Pudney. 160

CWBII

Sunday by Sunday hymn suggestions
For the fruits of all creation. Fred Pratt Green. 488
Take the word of God with you. James Harrison. 607
The kingdom of God. Bryn Rees. 616
We walk by faith. Henry Alford. 641

Psalms Selected by Chris deSilva and Angela McCarthy

Psalm 91: *Lord, it is good to give thanks to you.*
Psalm 91: Kathleen Boschetti MSC. CWB 372
Psalm 92: Lord, It Is Good to Give Thanks to You: Rosalie Bonighton. GA 54
Psalm 92 (91): Jenny O'Brien. JOBB pg. 66
Lord it is good: Tony Alonso. LPB pg. 116