

Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time – June 17, 2018

Our Lady of Perpetual Help

Scripture Reading: EZ 17:22-24

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.

Responsorial Psalm: PS 92:2-3, 13-14, 15-16

R. (cf. 2a) Lord, it is good to give thanks to you.

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

R. Lord, it is good to give thanks to you.

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.

R. Lord, it is good to give thanks to you.

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.

R. Lord, it is good to give thanks to you.

Scripture Reading: 2 COR 5:6-10

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.

Gospel: MK 4:26-34

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.

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INVITATION TO PRAY

Pause for a few moments of silence and enter more deeply into the presens of God..

Proclaim the Scriptures out loud

As you listen to the scriptures be attentive to a Word, a phrase, a question, an image, or a feeling that emerges. Reflect on this quietly or share it aloud.

INVITATION TO REFLECT

In the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, depending on the translation you use the word “kingdom” or “reign” and the phrase “kingdom of God” or “reign of God” appear numerous times. And like today’s Gospel Reading it was an important topic of Jesus’ discourses, and obviously an important concept that he wanted his disciples, and future generations, to understand.

Jesus used many parables as verbal visual aids to express the immensity, nature, and value of the Kingdom or Reign of God. These word pictures, such as a woman sweeping her house until she finds the missing coin, still communicate to us today, and at the same time, like the disciples, we need a further explanation to grasp the full significance of what Jesus is teaching regarding the Kingdom/Reign of God. The Holy Spirit is ever present to illuminate our minds and give us understanding, and hopefully, we all are investing time daily to read and meditate on sacred Scripture. Fortunately, the Holy Spirit has been actively illuminating the meaning of Scripture for over 2000 years and we can draw upon this history of understanding and interpretation to enhance and focus our own meditation. I have found the book *Jesus of Nazareth** by Pope Benedict XVI to be very helpful in this way. Referencing Origen, an early Church Father, Pope Benedict XVI introduces three dimensions in which the Kingdom/Reign of God can be interpreted:

Christological—Wherein the Kingdom is a person. “Jesus himself is the Kingdom; the Kingdom is not a thing, it is not a geographical dominion like worldly kingdoms. It is a person; it is he. ...Jesus leads men to realize the overwhelming fact that in him God himself is present among them, that he is God’s presence.”

Idealistic or Mystical—Wherein the Kingdom is a reflection of God’s reign in us. “It sees man’s interiority as the essential location of the Kingdom of God. ... The basic idea is clear: The ‘Kingdom of God’ is not to be found on any map. It is not a kingdom after the fashion of worldly kingdoms; it is located in man’s inner being. It grows and radiates outward from the inner space.”

Ecclesiastical—Wherein the Kingdom/Reign of God is expressed in the Church. “But nineteenth– and early –twentieth century theology did tend to speak of the Church as the Kingdom of God on earth; the Church was regarded as the actual presence of the Kingdom within history.”

As we meditate on the different statements of Jesus these three dimensions do shed light and help us understand what Jesus was emphasizing. Through them all though, is the presupposition that a Kingdom must have a King, and that King is Jesus. It presupposes that only one person can reign in the Kingdom, and that person should be Jesus not ourselves, or another. Pope Benedict XVI states it this way, “What is meant is not an imminent or yet to be established ‘kingdom’ but God’s actual sovereignty over the world, ... It would be better to speak of God’s being –Lord, of his lordship.”

Many of us have been baptized into his Kingdom as infants, some later in life, consequently it is easy to miss this concept and fail to answer the question, “Who is reigning in my life?” In one sense this reign comes about in our life gradually as this week’s Gospel Reading may speak of, yet for many when we ask ourselves this question there comes a sudden awakening that we need to step aside and allow Jesus to be seated on the throne of our lives—to genuinely experience “God’s actual sovereignty” in our life. His rule and reign is wonderful.

*Jesus of Nazareth, by Pope Benedict XVI, (quotes taken from pages 49-56).

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INVITATION TO GROUP SHARING

1. What does this passage from Ezekiel tell us about the nature and character of God's sovereignty?
2. What should be the focus or orientation of citizens of the Kingdom of God?
3. In what way(s) are we to be involved in the expansion of the Kingdom of God? To whom or what is the "seed" referring?

INVITATION TO ACT

Determine a specific action (individual or group) that flows from your sharing. When choosing an individual action, determine what you will do and share it with the group. When choosing a group action, determine who will take responsibility for different aspects of the action. These should be your primary considerations.

CLOSING INVITATION TO PRAY

Give thanks to God (aloud or silently) for new insights, for desires awakened, for directions clarified, for the gift of one another's openness and sensitivity. Conclude with a final prayer.