

Meditations: Sunday of the Eleventh Week of Ordinary Time (Year B)

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during the eleventh week of Ordinary Time. The topics are: God's pace; the power of the seed; the contrast between smallness and greatness.

- God's pace
- The power of the seed
- The contrast between smallness and greatness

HEAR ME, Lord, as I call to You. You are my help; do not reject me or abandon me, O God of my salvation (Ps 27:7,9).^[1] These pleas for help, attributed to King David, bring us into today's liturgy. Filled with confidence, we raise a song to the Lord this Sunday, asking Him to attend to our needs and accompany us through the difficulties that may arise in our daily journey. As Saint Thérèse of Lisieux noted, our prayer is "a surge of the heart... a cry of gratitude and love, in the midst of trial as well as joy. In one word, it is something great, something supernatural"^[2] that expands our soul and unites us to Jesus.

This Sunday's Gospel presents us with two brief parables: the seed that grows on its own and the mustard seed (cf. *Mk* 4:26-34). These are familiar images taken from the rural world, understandable to all his followers. *The Kingdom of God is like*

a man who scatters seed on the ground. It is like a mustard seed (Mk 4:31). Using the example of how the seed grows, Jesus wants to explain that it is not possible to judge the mysterious action of God by the smallness of its beginning. Although the Kingdom may seem insignificant at first, it actually has incredible strength, which unfolds over time.

At first glance, the seed is very small. Sometimes it is barely noticeable: its value seems almost insignificant. However, once buried, the seed grows and grows, unstoppable, producing fruit that surpasses the farmer's expectations. God's action in the world and history is not usually attention-grabbing, nor does it bring immediate results. In fact, it often appears wrapped in apparent failures. But within that small and discreet seed lies the promise of what is to come. When we see that the fruits take time to arrive, and our

desires for conversion are not always effective, we can look to the Lord, placing all our trust in Him. It is true that things seem to improve more slowly than we want them to, and sometimes we feel alone and as if we have no human support. Jesus reminds us that we start small because the seed has to grow interiorly first, hidden below ground. Later, when God wills, the time will come to reap its fruits. God's pace is not necessarily like ours.

THE FIRST parable focuses our attention on the dynamics of sowing. The seed that is sown in the earth sprouts whether the farmer is asleep or awake. It grows on its own. In sowing, the farmer trusts that his work will not be in vain; he knows the power of the seed when it receives the water it needs to

develop. All he needs is to plant the seed deep in the soil and water it regularly. He trusts that the soil holding the seed he has planted is good. *For the earth produces fruit by itself: first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear (Mk 4:28).*

"The present is the time of sowing, and the growth of the seed is assured by the Lord. Every Christian therefore knows well that he must do all he can, but that the final result depends on God: this awareness sustains him in his daily efforts, especially in difficult situations."^[3] Collaborating in the sowing of the divine word in the hearts of others is much like working in the field. We don't see fruit right away. In fact, we may never see the fruit with our own eyes. "Let us never forget, when we proclaim the Word, that even where it seems that nothing is happening, the Holy Spirit is at work, and the

Kingdom of God is already growing, through and beyond our efforts."^[4]

Our optimism and commitment are founded on this solid trust. We hear the apostle Paul telling the Corinthians not to doubt, for *it is God who gives the growth* (*1 Cor 3:7*), and we are merely *co-workers* with Him (*1 Cor 3:6-9*). It is reassuring to know that the fruit does not depend on what we can achieve with our limited strength. In reality, God is content with us doing what we can. In this vein, Saint Josemaría encouraged us to use all human means as if the supernatural ones did not exist, and vice versa, to use all supernatural means as if there were no human means at our disposal. "Act as though everything depended on you, but in the knowledge that really everything depends on God."^[5] God's work in history is fruitful because He is the Lord of the Kingdom. Often, what we

need to do is work while patiently awaiting the fruits. God's victory is assured.

THE SMALL mustard seed, says the second parable, *once sown, grows and becomes larger than all the garden plants, and puts out large branches, so that the birds of the air can nest in its shade* (Mk 4:32). As the days or months pass, the seed that started very small grows into something unimaginable. That seed, full of life, opens up, breaks from the ground, emerges into the sunlight, and grows into a tall tree. "Only when it is crushed does it spread its strength."^[6]

As in the first parable, here too we see the contrast between the smallness of the seed and the greatness of what it produces. We

may have experienced this ourselves: we know that God has called us to do great things, but we feel we are not up to task. But Christ called us simply because He wanted to, not because of our merits. He does not expect extraordinary things from us: He wants us to have the humility to let Him grow in our lives and to trust in his unconditional love, day after day. "The seed's weakness is its strength, its breaking open is its power. Thus the Kingdom of God is like this: a humanly small reality, made up of those who are poor in heart, of those who do not rely on their own power but on that of the love of God, on those who are not important in the world's eyes; and yet it is through them that Christ's power bursts in and transforms what is seemingly insignificant."^[7]

Our smallness does not matter much. Our fragility is not an insurmountable obstacle to the

action of grace. God makes everything great grow with the abundance of his gifts. "Forget that despair produced by the realization of your weakness. — True: financially you are a zero, in social standing another zero, and another in virtues, and another in talent. But to the left of these noughts, stands Christ. And what an incalculable figure we get!"^[8] The Virgin Mary welcomed the seed of the divine word as "good soil." We can ask her to strengthen in us this trust in the clear "disproportion between the means and the fruit that God brings forth. His salvific power has not been diminished, but he expects of each and every one of us, and also of those who find shelter in the shade of this leafy tree, our generous response, all that we are capable of, with his help."^[9]

^[1] Entrance antiphon.

^[2] St. Therese of Lisieux, *Story of a Soul*.

^[3] Benedict XVI, Angelus, 17-VI-2012.

^[4] Pope Francis, Angelus, 16-VII-2023.

^[5] Pedro de Ribadeneira, *Vita di S. Ignazio di Loyola* (qtd. Benedict XVI, Angelus, 17-VI-2012).

^[6] Saint Ambrose of Milan, *On the Gospel of Luke*, VII, 179-182

^[7] Benedict XVI, Angelus, 17-VI-2012.

^[8] Saint Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 473.

^[9] Msgr. Javier Echevarría, Pastoral Letter, 1-X-2016.

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