

Meditations: Friday of the Third Week of Ordinary Time

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during the third week of Ordinary Time. The topics are: God makes his Kingdom grow; entrusting our strength to the Lord's; seeking Jesus like the disciples did.

- God makes his Kingdom grow
- Entrusting our strength to the Lord's
- Seeking Jesus like the disciples did

TO ILLUSTRATE what the Kingdom of God is like and how it develops, Jesus once again uses comparisons with aspects of agricultural life, which were very familiar to his listeners: *It is as if a man were to scatter seed upon the earth, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he knows not how. The earth produces of itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear (Mk 4:26-29).* Today's Gospel reading presents two parables: the one we have just read, about the growth of the wheat seed; and the next, about the small mustard seed that becomes a large bush, where the birds of the sky can nest.

“In the first parable, attention is placed on the fact that the seed scattered on the ground takes root and develops on its own, regardless of whether the farmer sleeps or keeps watch. He is confident in the

inner power of the seed itself and in the fertility of the soil. In the language of the Gospel, the seed is the symbol of the Word of God [...]. This Word, if accepted, certainly bears fruit, for God Himself makes it sprout and grow in ways that we cannot always verify or understand. All this tells us that it is always God, it is always God who makes his Kingdom grow. That is why we fervently pray ‘thy Kingdom come.’ It is He who makes it grow. Man is his humble collaborator, who contemplates and rejoices in divine creative action and waits patiently for its fruits.”^[1]

“As soon as you truly abandon yourself in the Lord,” St. Josemaría wrote, “you will know how to be content with whatever happens. You will not lose your peace if your undertakings do not turn out the way you hoped, even if you have put everything into them, and used all

the means necessary. For they will have ‘turned out’ the way God wants them to.”^[2]

IN THE SECOND parable, Jesus uses the image of the mustard seed to describe the Kingdom of God: *When it is sown upon the earth, it is the smallest of all seeds on the earth; yet once it is sown, it grows up and becomes larger than all garden plants, and puts out large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade* (Mk 4:31-32). In St. John Chrysostom’s interpretation of this passage, the mustard seed is Christ, who, in his Incarnation, became small and humble to be the servant of all; He suffered on the Cross, died for us, and with his Resurrection grew up to heaven, like a tree that shelters us and grants us immortality.^[3]

Although infinitely great, Christ made Himself small, seemingly insignificant. Thus, to enter into the dynamic of the Kingdom of God, we must be poor in spirit, allowing Christ to live in us; a poverty of spirit that leads us not to act in order to be “important in the eyes of the world, but precious in the eyes of God, who prefers the simple and the humble. When we live like this, the strength of Christ bursts through us and transforms what is small and modest into a reality that leavens the entire mass of the world and of history.”^[4]

And the message of this second parable reinforces that of the first: “The Kingdom of God, although requiring our collaboration, is first and foremost a gift from the Lord, grace that precedes man and his works. Our small strength, seemingly powerless before the world’s problems, if united with God’s, does not fear obstacles, because the

victory of the Lord is certain [...]. The seed sprouts and grows because it is nourished by God's love."^[5]

WITH MANY such parables He spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; and He did not speak to them without a parable, but privately to His disciples He explained everything (Mk 4:33-34). This is how St. Mark concludes his account. The evangelist distinguishes between the people who heard Jesus' teachings for the first time or only occasionally, and the disciples who habitually followed the Lord. Jesus spent long periods alone with the latter group, explaining his teachings more deeply. Those disciples would have begun as just part of the crowd: one day, someone spoke to them about Jesus, and they approached to hear Him. They may have come to Him

out of mere curiosity, but over time, after one or more encounters with the Lord, they began to follow Him as disciples.

Something similar happens to us. When we encounter Jesus in the pages of the Gospel, we immediately want to know more; we are moved to delve into the meaning of his life and words. We sense that in Christ “are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge,”^[6] and we long to be enriched by them. “If we have learned to contemplate the mystery of Christ, if we make an effort to see him clearly, we will realize that now we can come very near Jesus too, in body and soul. Christ has pointed out the way to us clearly. We can be with him in the bread and in the word, receiving the nourishment of the Eucharist and knowing and fulfilling all that he came to teach us, as we meet and deal with him in our prayer.”^[7]

And quite naturally — though sometimes with effort — we seek our Lord's constant company. Then we understand Mary better, who *kept all these things, pondering them in her heart* (Lk 2:19). We can ask our Mother to help us also receive God's Word and reflect on its meaning so that it may bear abundant fruit.

^[1]Pope Francis, Angelus, 14-VI-2015.

^[2]St. Josemaría, *Furrow*, no. 860.

^[3]Attr. to St. John Chrysostom, Homily.

^[4]Pope Francis, Angelus, 14-VI-2015.

^[5]Pope Benedict XVI, Angelus, 17-VI-2012.

^[6]St. John of the Cross, *Spiritual Canticle*, stanza 36, 3.

^[7]St. Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 118.

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