

17th June 2018 (11th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B)

Ezekiel 17:22-24; Psalm 91(92):2-3,13-16; 2 Corinthians 5:6-10; Mark 4:26-34.

What can we say the kingdom of God is like?

The concept of the Kingdom of God is an elusive one; in today's gospel Jesus himself struggles to explain what it really is. He narrates two parallel parables that in some way could give us an idea of how to understand this term.

At times we, perhaps conveniently, push the kingdom of God away from us and believe that it refers to the afterlife, paradise. At other times we have tried to identify the kingdom with being part of the Church, perhaps even limiting it to the Catholic Church. These concepts do not correspond with the parables we have before us today.

When we look at these two parables, we notice that the kingdom of God starts from very humble beginnings and then needs time to grow into maturity.

May I suggest that once we believe and declare God to be the creator and lord of all that exists, then existence itself becomes God's kingdom! God has always been Lord and like him, this kingdom knows no beginning and has no end.

God has hidden the seeds of his kingdom within creation; these seeds are very small and cannot be observed. Some struggle to understand the kingdom of God because it is hidden from them and they cannot experience it, calling themselves agnostics or atheists.

The presence and life of God, this kingdom of God, is within each of us and it grows in silence – how, we do not know! The book of Genesis calls it God's image and likeness. Sometimes we may be lucky to be able to observe the growth of this kingdom within us or in people around us, but often it is hidden from our eyes. The parable compares this to the experience of the farmer who does not know how the soil does its work, producing shoot, ear and grain, or a shrub. Even if we were to sit and stare at the plant, we will not see it grow.

For us Christians the kingdom of God in us is also nourished by the word of God that we receive, by our participation in the life of the body of Christ, by the sacraments, and by our prayer in faith. When we live our life of faith in love and service to others, like the farmer we are sowing these seeds of the kingdom and nourishing them, but like the farmer, we need to let God carry out his own work, in secret.

I am sure that at times this feels very frustrating for the poor farmer who would rather speed up the process; at times the growth of the kingdom of God is also frustrating for us as we cannot see any growth around us and perhaps at times we might be tempted to panic or to give up. In today's parables Jesus tells the disciples to be patient and wait, letting God be God!

The harvest time represents Jesus' second coming and at that time the Kingdom of God will have produced its fruit and the mustard shrub would have grown big enough to provide shelter to the birds of the air.

The role of the farmer is to sow the seed, water and weed, and then gather in the harvest. The rest of the work belongs to God alone! Our role is to sow the seeds of the kingdom within us and around us!

Fr Mario