

Fr. Nick Dant's Homily, Saint Matthew Catholic Church, Indianapolis
Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle B, June 12-13, 2021

This Sunday, the Church definitely returns to simple Ordinary Time, everything being vested now in green. Since February 17th, we have observed Lent, celebrated Eastertime, and just celebrated the major Feasts of the Most Holy Trinity, and the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. Yet, even as our liturgical calendar announces we are back in Ordinary Time, we may feel stuck, definitely longing for the ordinariness of life that existed before March 11, 2020, when COVID-19 was officially declared a global pandemic and turned our world upside down. Life is still anything but ordinary.

It is too soon to figure out what we have learned from our pandemic: nevertheless, our scriptures this weekend can help us ease out of the mindset of our pandemic lifestyle. We are invited to pause and appreciate the providence of God in our lives, who is the one who guides and sustains us. Hopefully, remembering everything is in God's hands can help us to recover some sense of ordinariness.

Ezekiel, in our Old Testament passage, tells a parable about God taking "a shoot from the crest of a mighty cedar" and planting that "tender shoot" on a high, lofty mountain in the mountain heights of Israel. Ezekiel tells us: "It shall put forth branches and bear fruit and become a majestic cedar." In our gospel passage from Mark, Jesus tells us two parables also using agrarian imagery: one about a man planting a seed and doing his work day and night to nourish the seeds, watching them grow, yet not knowing how they grow! The second parable is about a small mustard seed. Jesus says it is the smallest of seeds, but when planted, grown into the largest of shrubs with branches big enough for birds to dwell in.

Both Ezekiel and Mark shared their parables not to offer lessons in agriculture but to remind believers that God is at the heart of all we are. We are asked to accept the fact that we do not create our own life, nor control our life's purpose, or our life's final goal. We are not the center of the universe, rather God is at the center of all that is. It is God who mysteriously brings about the growth of his reign.

In Ezekiel, God says: "I will take from the crest of the cedar," "I will plant," "I, the Lord, bring low the high tree, lift high the lowly tree." "As I, the Lord, have spoken, so will I do." In his parable about the planting of the seed, Jesus says the farmer does not know how the seed sprouts and grows, implying that it is God who gives the growth. It's true we all have our part to contribute and God expects us to do our part - after all, the farmer does the planting of the seed. The farmer, also, day after day does all that is necessary to foster the seeds' growth by watering and fertilizing. Yet, it is God who will achieve what is far beyond our human capacity: the tender shoot growing into a mighty cedar, the mustard seed growing into the largest of plants, where even birds can nest.

Paul the Apostle once told the people of Corinth: "I planted the seed and Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. This means that neither he who plants nor he who waters is of any special account, only God, who causes the growth." (1 Cor 3:6-7).

There is a mystery at the heart of the growth of God's Kingdom! All we can do is humbly offer ourselves as instruments in God's hands, always remaining courageous in faith that God will accomplish more that we can dream of!