

11th Sunday in Ordinary Time

June 16-17, 2018

Readings: Ezekiel 17:22-24; 2 Cor. 5:6-10; Mark 4:26-34

In preparing to move my parents from their home of fifty-two years, it is impossible not to reflect on memories, or even come across old photos and memorabilia when foraging through their belongings. While seeing a photo of me in my Nativity School baseball uniform was amusing in itself, in point of fact my attention was drawn, not to my visage, but rather to the tree I was grasping with my hand. I could not believe how tiny it appeared. I had forgotten what it looked like forty-one years ago.

Growth is incremental, almost imperceptible, and with the passage of time, we often forget it has taken place. My hand fit rather nicely around the saplings circumference, and decades later its trunk is imposing, as the tree fills the entirety of the back yard.

The tender shoot is used as an image in today's first reading from the prophet Ezekiel. Today's passage is preceded by a complicated allegory of two eagles, each seen to represent various Israelite Kings in the 6th century B.C. Included in this would be Zedekiah, the last King of Judah before the destruction of the Kingdom by Babylon, and the time of the Jewish exile. Israel had turned away from their oaths, and sought solace in the arms of a foreign nation, Egypt.

The image of the Cedar tree is symbolic of how "the Lord will undo the actions of the Babylonian king by rebuilding the dynasty of King David, so the nations realize that only the God of Israel can restore a people's destiny."¹ God promised to take back a remnant, the sprig of the cedar, and in the future make it flourish in its own land, for there would be later on a Davidic king, Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

The world leaders are no longer the major players; they must cede to the power of the Lord. God will plant the twig on a lofty mountain. Only when the leaders were humbled, could they then be exalted by

¹ New American Bible, footnotes for this passage, Ezekiel 17:22-24.

means of the work of the Lord. In her powerful prayer called the *Magnificat* found in Luke's Gospel, Mary says, "He has cast down the mighty from their thrones and has lifted up the lowly."

I have long been uncomfortable with the phrase "most powerful man on the face of the earth," when used in reference to any world leader. It is equally uncomfortable when the term "power" is used with reference to the Church. Rather, it seems to me that Scripture is replete with lessons of humility for the world's powerful.

We recently celebrated two great feasts—the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Both of them show forth the depths of love that God has for us and the depth of love that we ought to have for God. In both feasts, it is the love poured forth from the heart that stands out.

The Gospel image of the Mustard seed is a beautiful one for the Kingdom of God because it reveals that the Kingdom can grow, expand, and spread. The various images presented in all three readings today coalesce into a vision in which God, whether in separating a tender shoot from the cedar to make the withered tree bloom, or protecting the tiniest seed to facilitate a great mustard plant— in each of these, God protects the fragile beginnings, so that a stronger and more vibrant reality will emerge.

For now, God will strengthen our weak limbs, he will enable our life of faith to bloom and prosper, and even in the midst of everything swirling around us, we will remain courageous, aspiring to please God above all else.