

**What Prevents the Harvest**  
**11<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)**  
**(Mk 4:26-34)**

Jesus teaches about the Kingdom of God using examples from nature. Among his favorite images is the seed, which he uses many times in the Gospel. Both parables in today's reading explain the mystery of God's Kingdom by means of a seed which grows into a plant.

In the first parable, Jesus observes how the farmer does not make the plant grow, it happens on its own. After sowing a wheat field, for instance, the farmer has to wait, while the earth of its own accord brings forth first the blade, then the ear, and finally the grain to be harvested.

In the second parable, Jesus highlights the miracle by which something great (a mighty tree, a large bush) comes from something small (a tiny seed). To emphasize his point, he uses the example of a mustard seed, no bigger than a grain of sand.

In each case, something happens that is extraordinary, and it happens by a power that is not man's. The Kingdom of God is something extraordinary, and it comes about through the power of God, not man.

When Jesus uses the expression "The Kingdom of God," he is talking about something real which comes into existence in the world. It is a people who live under the dominion of Christ the King. But it is not a regular country that has physical borders; instead it exists across all countries and tongues (the Kingdom of God is "Catholic"). The Kingdom of God is brought about through the sacraments, which bring the grace of salvation and holiness into people's lives. The Kingdom of God is established by the Church which acts in Christ's name. We can also describe the Kingdom of God as the spiritual life: it is the presence of the Holy Spirit in the soul, Who brings God's truth and love.

Because it is invisible – spiritual – the Kingdom of God is mysterious. How it comes into being, how it grows and develops, how it brings fruit through the work of the apostles and Church yet is not limited to their efforts, all of this is mysterious, and works differently from human expectation. And so Jesus gives us these parables from nature to help us appreciate the miracle of the Kingdom.

It is a sad situation when children sometimes grow up and leave the Church. Parents wonder what went wrong, or how they failed. Priests too, experience this when a parishioner leaves the Church, or abandons the practice of the faith. The parable of the farmer reminds us that no parent or priest actually causes the growth

of the spiritual life in a soul. Even among the 12 apostles, Judas abandoned the grace of the Holy Spirit and came to spiritual destruction. It is God who gives growth, and this process happens uniquely in each individual's life.

Nevertheless, that does not excuse the farmer from his obligations. God gives the growth, but He works through the Church and her apostles, through the priests and parents.

First of all, the farmer must "sow the seed." If the farmer never sows, there will be no harvest. In the Kingdom of God, the sowing of the seed is the proclamation of the Gospel, the teaching of the faith; "*The seed is the word of God*" (cf. Lk 8:11). Parents – and priests – must ask themselves honestly if they have preached. The Word of God has an efficacious power in someone's life through the presence of the Holy Spirit, but it must be delivered, introduced, explained, shared. And it must lead to the sacraments. There are many times a preacher falls short in the task of proclaiming God's Word, because it may be challenging or demanding both of him and of the hearer. There are many times priests and bishops "water down" the Gospel, reducing it to nice platitudes or political platforms, emptying it of its supernatural content. As a result, there is no harvest.

Likewise, there are many times the preacher (including parents) fails to live what he believes, thus undermining the very word he seeks to proclaim as a Catholic. Besides sowing the seed, the farmer must prepare the soil, and keep it fertile. This is a laborious task of tilling, weeding, fertilizing, and irrigating. If the seed does not have good soil, the harvest will be slim. To be effective, parents and priests must create a good environment in which to share the faith, so that it might take root and flourish in the lives of children. This "fertile soil" is an environment of love and faith, hospitality and joy. Parents must love each other visibly, and manifest their kindness and selflessness concretely. Many are the "Catholic" households and parishes where there is nothing but bickering and self-seeking. As a result, there is no harvest, and many leave.

In the second parable, Jesus teaches another principle of the Kingdom of God, by which a great harvest is brought about. Unlike the world, which solves problems and achieves results by investing great sums of money, the Kingdom of God is built through little things. No one has to wait before being able to start achieving great things for God. You don't need a lot of resources, grand programs, a huge budget. In fact, it is much better when these are not available. Each day God provides countless opportunities to do little things – almost hidden – seemingly the size of a mustard seed. Done with great love, they become great in their effect and result, through the power of God.

It is the hidden sacrifices, good deeds, and prayers of the least of God's servants that has changed the world, and unleashed a harvest of justice and goodness in people's lives. Thus by means of these parables Jesus reveals the errors of our ways, and shows us the fruitful path. Let us recommit ourselves to the task at hand, which is to bring forth a great harvest in the Kingdom of God.