

ORDINARY SUNDAY XI “B”
JUNE 13/14, 2015

Recently I viewed a commercial on television marketing a special global positioning program that maps a farm field and determines the soil’s nitrogen level. This ad stated that for \$1,500.00 a farmer could purchase it to evaluate the entire farm’s acreage. This program is designed to assist the farmer in knowing where and how much additional nitrogen is needed for the soil to produce an optimum harvest. “Wow!” I thought. “Farming sure isn’t what it was when I was a child, much less as Jesus describes it in today’s Gospel story.”

No modern farmer would do what the farmer in the first parable in the gospel relates. Seeds are not “scatter[ed]...on the land” but carefully placed in precise rows. The farmer does not “sleep and rise night and day” without any regard for what has been planted. Instead, the farmer knows that of “its own accord the land” may not yield what the farmer needs to cover costs and make a living. So the farmer fertilizes, irrigates, spreads herbicides, checks weather reports, and prays a lot! Farming has become big-business. We now often speak of “agri-business” an exacting science, a science which many of you in this community are engaged in in various ways. But for all the research, all the technology, the farmer (and, yes, even the backyard gardener!) know, neither nature alone nor human effort can guarantee a desired agricultural outcome. To be a farmer, or the backyard gardener, necessarily calls forth both faith and hope! And it is these two virtues of faith and hope in our lives of discipleship that the scriptures address today.

The second parable in the gospel speaks about a mustard seed, a seed so small; the sort of thing most of us would overlook.

In today’s gospel, both the land and the seed actualize their potential—they do what by nature they have been created to do. These two images are used by Jesus to help us grasp what is surely a mystery: the “kingdom of God.” The kingdom of God is not a place or space. It is not something we can discover or conquer. The kingdom of God is an invitation to relationship, relationship with God in and through Jesus. And entering into this

relationship, planting ourselves in the field of God's life, allowing the Holy Spirit, to accomplish the harvest God intends to bring forth from us, as he speaks about it through the prophet Ezekiel in the first reading through the image of a cutting from a cedar tree being planted on a mountain top and yielding an abundant harvest, or the mustard seed in the gospel becoming the largest of plants, so large that the "birds of the sky can dwell in its shade" demands faith—often great faith! It seems all so...improbable.

Let's face it: the mustard seed is so small. But, like all seed, it holds something tantalizing: it contains the potential for growth and life, shelter and shade if planted in good soil, nurtured by human and divine care. Its future is vast—a story to be told, a purpose waiting to be fulfilled. Our life is a mustard seed, planted in the field of God's divine life.

How often we forget this, when it comes to our life, or in the lives of other people, particularly the "little mustard seeds" of the world—the elderly, the poor, the disabled, the immigrant, the lonely, the unborn; those Pope Francis continues to remind us are found on the "peripheries of life."

Jesus assures us that every seed, every human life, even the smallest, contains possibility and purpose. Hold a seed in your hand, and you're holding a future still unwritten. We can't imagine what will come.

Like the farmer, or the backyard gardener, we need the courage, the hope, spoken about by St. Paul in our second reading, "walking by faith, not by sight" trusting that God who has planted the seed of his divine life within each of us, will, with our cooperation, produce an abundant harvest. This is what the kingdom is like, a relationship where everyone, is given the grace to grow. Through our cooperation with divine grace, through surrender to God's ways, living in a way consistent with God, through being watered with the word of God through reading, study and reflection on the Scriptures; being fed through the sacraments, especially the Holy Eucharist and Penance, growing through the sunlight of prayer, we produce first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. We become living parables doing what God created us to be. Perhaps this is the greatest mystery of all.