

HOMILY for 16th SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME – Year A

This Sunday's Gospel uses 3 Parables to tell us about the Kingdom of God or Kingdom of Heaven, which reminds me of this cute story that I'd like to share with you.

Two eighty-year-old men had been friends since their Little League baseball days. One of them came down with a terminal illness; & his best friend was with him by his deathbed.

"Will you do me a favor?" the healthy friend asked. "I'm hoping there is baseball in Heaven. When you get there, can you find out & let me know somehow?"

The dying man said, "We've been friends for almost all of our lives. I will try and get the answer to you asap."

Several days after the old man's death, his friend was sleeping when he had a vivid dream. His lifelong friend appeared to him & said, "The Good News is that there is definitely baseball in Heaven, my friend! The bad news is that you're pitching this Wednesday."

Anyway, like the Holy Trinity & other faith-related matters, the Kingdom of Heaven or the Kingdom of God remains the mystery. This Sunday's Gospel is one of a few times that Jesus tells us about it through the parables. In fact, He uses three parables to explain the Kingdom of God for us. Instead of picking one of them to use for this homily, I'll try to explain all three parables to help us understand the Kingdom of God a little better.

First, the Kingdom of God is compared to the yeast which a woman takes & kneads with measures of flour. Eventually the whole mass of dough begins to rise. So, the kingdom of God is mysterious & insignificant like the yeast. It can stand alone & remain mysterious & non-useful like the yeast. But, we can mix it with the world & our daily life like we knead the yeast with measures of flour. Once that happens, we could sit back & watch the magic of that mixture unfold before our eyes after a couple of days. As a child, I was privileged to see how my mom baked a fresh loaf of bread or a tasty cake from scratch like that. I've continued to be fascinated by the mystery of the yeast & the magical interaction between it & the flour to make the dough rise & produce a delicious loaf of bread or a tasty cake. Similarly, I remain captivated by the mystery of the Kingdom of God because it could stand alone & be no good for the world. But, if we know how to mix it with our daily life, it could bring us all sorts of wonderful results & let us see an awesome miracle every day.

Second, the Kingdom of God is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest seed of all. Once it's sown in the field & full-grown, it is the largest of plants. It becomes so big a shrub that the birds of the sky come & build their nests in its branches. We have been reminded how God could use something small & insignificant & non-useful such as a mustard seed & grow it into a shrub/tree that would provide shelter & great protection for birds & many living things. Similarly, God could use the Kingdom of God, which is insignificant & non-useful in the eyes of the public, to provide spiritual shelter & bring many people a sense of security & protection. They could count on the kingdom of God to protect them from all the dangers & uncertainties of this world & give them hope & purpose for their lives. They could rely on the kingdom of God to comfort them in down & difficult moments & guide them in times of discernment & confusion. As we have heard a lot about mental health problems lately, we could let the kingdom of God bring us healing & miracles daily. We could let the kingdom of God grow within us like a mustard seed & bring us protection & guidance. For anyone who knows the power & blessings of a good spiritual life would count on it for strength & guidance in one's daily life.

But, in the public's eyes, a good spiritual life or the kingdom of God might look useless or appear like a waste of time.

Lastly, the kingdom of God might be likened to a person who sowed good seed in the one's field. While everyone was asleep, one's enemy came & sowed weeds through one's wheat. When the crop began to mature & yield grain, the weeds made their appearance as well... His workers said, "Do you want us to go out & pull them up?" "No," the sower replied, "Pull up the weeds & you might take the wheat along with them. Let them grow together until the harvest. Then, at harvest time, I will collect the weeds & bundle them up to burn while gathering the wheat into my barn." I don't know about you, but most of us would want to or try to pull out all the weeds if we see them. For they irritate/annoy us & pose a great threat to our field & its yield. Worst yet, they might invade our fields & destroy our entire harvest. The sooner we pull out the weeds & stop the threat to our field & harvest the better our future of farming will be. We often use this same thinking & strategy in dealing with evil & the power of darkness. That is why many people do not like to see bad folks & evil spirits keep roaming our world as if God is oblivious to their evil acts or unable to do anything about it.

However, today Jesus wants to give us the answer for the question "Why does evil exist in the world?" He also wants to let us know that God will hold everyone accountable for one's actions on Judgment Day. Meanwhile, God will allow evil to exist alongside with goodness or bad people to stand side by side with good folks. That decision of God might confuse us & make us wonder if there is a god or if it is worthwhile to follow God's Commandments & do all the good & right things. God sure has the reasons to allow evil to exist & bad people to keep on living in the world with the hope of their repentance. We got to trust that God will punish bad people & reward the good folks on Judgment Day. We need to let God judge & hold everyone accountable for one's actions on the Last Day. It is our main duty to focus on God's Commandments & do all the good things. We must imitate & be like our God as this Sunday's First Reading praises Him in this way, "... Your might is the source of justice; your mastery over all things makes you lenient to all... Though you are mastery of might, you judge with clemency; & with much lenience you govern us... And you taught your people that those who are just must be kind; & that you gave your children good ground for hope that you would permit repentance for their sins."

My dear brothers & sisters, the Kingdom of God remains mysterious & incomprehensible to most of us. But, today Jesus tries to use three parables to explain it & give us a glimpse of it. Let's work hard to find a way to it & prepare a place for ourselves in it after this life.