

Beloved in Christ, the theme that runs through the readings is hope in God. All the readings are meant to boost our courage; there is a common lesson in all the readings as follows: the success of the Kingdom of God, both within us and in the world at large, is more God's work than ours. We should not trust ourselves but to place our hope in God. All that God wants from us is that we should do our best to do God's will at all times in spite of our weaknesses.

In the first reading, prophet Ezekiel consoles his troubled and despairing fellow citizens with the promise of God's Kingdom to come. He was speaking about the spiritual kingdom of God to come. It will be a Kingdom of prosperity and peace, with a Messiah, an anointed King who would come to establish an everlasting Kingdom that will last forever. God can do whatever seems impossible: '...I, the Lord, bring low the high tree, lift high the lowly tree, wither up the green tree, and make the withered tree bloom (Ezekiel 17:24). The meaning is clear; Israel, in exile, was like a withered tree about to disappear, God would see to it that it grew into a nation again, while those powerful kingdoms, which oppressed Israel, would disappear.

The Bible begins with the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen.2:9). It ends with the tree of life in the bank of the river of life- giving water in heaven (Rev.22:1-2). Ezekiel described the Messianic kingdom as a majestic cedar tree on the high mountain (Ez.17:22-23). In contrast, Jesus described his kingdom in a much less impressive way as being like a mustard tree. "It is like a mustard seed that, when it is sown in the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on the earth. But once it is sown, it springs up and becomes the largest of plants and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the sky can dwell in its shade." (Mk.4:32). What can mustard seeds teach us about the kingdom of God? The tiny mustard seed literally grew to become a big tree of which numerous birds are attracted to it because of the black seed it produced. In the like manner, God's kingdom starts from the smallest beginning from our heart that transforms us from within through the grace of the Holy Spirit.

Today's parables throw helpful light on our present situation. According to the first parable of the sower and the seed, when it comes to the Kingdom, God is the life-source, the one who enables. Like the farmer, we are not in control – though we do need to cooperate. As the second parable about the mustard-seed puts it, we may not be successful at any given moment and our prospects may not be promising. But the life-giving God is there, is always there, able and likely to do the totally unexpected.

Unless we ourselves prevent it, God's kingdom keeps on growing within us at all times. This is the core message in the today's Gospel. God himself planted the seed through the word of God preached to us; this seed spouted at Baptism and has been growing ever since. It goes on growing unless we destroy it through serious sin. Prayer, meditating on the Word of God, the Eucharist and the other sacraments are the rain and sunlight that promote the growth of the God's kingdom within us. As Saint Paul puts it in the nice way in the second reading that "we walk by faith, not by sight (2 Cor.5:6).

Finally, brothers and sisters, God's kingdom will attain maturity in us if we keep on doing God's will during our life time. This is our contribution we must do and the rest is the work of God. The fact is that, God silently works a transformation in us, whether we are asleep or awake, causing resolution to take shape in our soul; a resolution to be faithful, to surrender ourselves, to respond to the grace – until we reach "mature manhood". May God give us his grace to attain maturity in our worship in faith and hope. Amen!