

FIRST READING – ORDINARY 11 B

A reading from the book of the Prophet Ezekiel.

Pause – and look up at the assembly

Thus says the Lord God:
“I myself will take a sprig
from the lofty top of a cedar;
I will set it out.
I will break off a tender one
from the topmost of its young twigs;
I myself will plant it
on a high and lofty mountain.
On the mountain height of Israel
I will plant it,
in order that it may produce boughs and bear fruit,
and become a noble cedar.
Under it every kind of bird will live;
in the shade of its branches will nest
winged creatures of every kind.
All the trees of the field shall know
that I am the Lord.
I bring low the high tree,
I make high the low tree;
I dry up the green tree
and make the dry tree flourish.
I the Lord have spoken;
I will accomplish it.”



Pause for **THREE** seconds
then look up at the people
and say SLOWLY:

The WORD of the LORD.

Thanks be to God.

SECOND READING – ORDINARY 11 B

A reading from the second letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians.

Pause – and look up at the assembly

Brothers and sisters:
we are always confident,
even though we know that while we are at home in the body
we are away from the Lord –
for we walk by faith, not by sight.
Yes, we do have confidence,
and we would rather be away from the body
and at home with the Lord.
So whether we are at home or away,
we make it our aim to please him.
For all of us must appear before the judgment seat of Christ,
so that each may receive recompense
for what has been done in the body,
whether good or evil.



Pause for **THREE** seconds
then look up at the people
and say SLOWLY:

The WORD of the LORD.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL READING – ORDINARY 11 B

The Lord be with you.

And with your spirit.

A reading from the holy gospel according to Mark.

Glory to you, O Lord.

Such a large crowd gathered around Jesus
that he got into a boat and began to teach them using many parables.

Jesus said,

“The kingdom of God is as if a man would scatter seed on the ground,
and would sleep and rise night and day,
and the seed would sprout and grow,
without his knowing how.

The earth produces of itself,
first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head.

But when the grain is ripe,
at once he goes in with his sickle,
because the harvest has come.”

Jesus also said,

“With what can we compare the kingdom of God,
or what parable will we use for it?

It is like a mustard seed,
which, when sown upon the ground,
is the smallest of all the seeds on earth;
yet when it is sown it grows up
and becomes the greatest of all shrubs,
and puts forth large branches,
so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.”

With many such parables Jesus spoke the word to them,
as they were able to hear it;
he did not speak to them except in parables,
but he explained everything in private to his disciples.



The GOSPEL of the LORD.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

SCRIPTURES IN DEPTH

Reading I: Ezekiel 17: 22-24

Together with the more usually cited Dan 4:10, 20-21, Ezekiel's allegory of the cedar tree is a source of the imagery of the mustard bush in the gospel reading. The cedar stands for the restoration of the Davidic monarchy after the exile. The shoot or twig (see Isa 11:1) refers to a descendant of Jehoiachin, the last Davidic king before the exile.

The beasts and birds represent the nations of the earth. This indicates that the prophecy expects the kingdom after the return from exile to be more than just the mere restoration of the status quo before the exile; in fact, it is to be the realization of the messianic kingdom. It is therefore legitimate to say that this prophecy finds its ultimate fulfillment in the kingdom of Christ, of which the church on earth is a foretaste.

Responsorial Psalm: 92:2-3, 13-14, 15-16

This psalm of thanksgiving is preoccupied with the theme of moral retribution. Yahweh is praised for his mighty acts, especially in rewarding the righteous with prosperity, so that they become like fruitful trees.

According to the Mishnah, this psalm was used at the morning sacrifice, particularly on the sabbath. It expresses the Deuteronomic theology, a viewpoint that has to be balanced by that of other Works such as Psalm 73 or the Book of Job, which recognize that the righteous do not always prosper and that reward often seems to go to the Wicked.

Reading II: 2 Corinthians 5: 6-10

We are still in that part of 2 Corinthians where Paul is defending his apostleship against the attacks of the false apostles. His emphasis on his apostolic sufferings had led him to speak about his confident hope of resurrection. Despite the fact that the gospel is committed to frail earthen vessels, there is no room for despondency. In speaking once more of his hope, Paul drops the metaphor of a "tent" for this frail earthly existence and speaks directly of the body. He can, he says, face the dissolution of the body, already presaged in his apostolic sufferings, with confidence because God will replace it with the resurrection body. And that will be a great gain, for in this present body we are absent from the Lord; we are certainly "in" Christ already as members of his body but not yet "with" Christ (as the false apostles taught, overemphasizing the "already").

In the letters of his middle period, Paul is coming to take seriously the possibility of his own death before the *parousia*. This hope of resurrection is not just a dreaming about "pie in the sky when we die" but provides a powerful motivation for life now—to please the Lord. It must be our aim now to please the Lord because at the *parousia* we will all have to appear before the judgment seat of Christ.

This belief in a Last Judgment according to our works is not a hangover from Paul's earlier Judaism, nor is it inconsistent with his message of justification by faith and grace alone. Faith must, if it is genuine, work in love. We are responsible for our sins and failures even if our good works are the fruit of the Spirit. If we receive a reward for our good works, this reward is not a prize for good behavior but the fulfillment of our human destiny.

Gospel: Mark 4:26-34

This reading consists of two little parables—the seed growing secretly and the mustard seed—and a generalizing conclusion to the collection of parables in Mark 4. This collection of parables, probably made already at the pre-Markan stage, was concerned with seed and sowing. They are strung together with the formula "And he said."

Each parable, it will be remembered, contains one main point that is its basic message. The parable of the seed growing secretly seeks to inculcate trust on the part of Jesus' disciples that the kingdom, already hiddenly at work in Jesus' ministry, will, in God's good time, become manifest and be consummated. It is possible that the parable was originally a polemic against the Zealot policy of armed rebellion against Rome as a means of bringing in the kingdom. It is most important to avoid interpreting this parable by emphasizing the idea of growth, appealing though that may be to modern botanical knowledge and modern evolutionary ideology.

The ancients did not understand the process of growth as we do; they thought only of the contrast between the seed and the grown plant or tree. Hence, the basic point of the parable is the contrast between the insignificant beginnings of Jesus' ministry and the final cosmic event of the coming of the kingdom of God.

In interpreting the second parable, that of the mustard seed, the same considerations apply. It does not speak of the evolutionary growth of the kingdom or the church. The only difference between the two parables is that the first emphasizes that the farmer can do nothing to produce or hasten the end of the process, whereas the second emphasizes exclusively the contrast between the small beginnings and the final consummation.

Reginald H. Fuller