

Eleventh Sunday of the Year – June 17, 2018

Ezekiel 17: 22-24 2 Corinthians 5: 6-10 Mark 4: 26-34

A favorite expression used by Pope Francis when he is addressing and encouraging priests and pastors is to remind them to have “the smell of the sheep.” In other words, he is urging them strongly to be part of the life of the people they serve. The imagery, of course, is based upon the references and parables of Jesus in which he speaks of himself as the Good Shepherd or uses a faithful shepherd as an example of the care that is to be shown for those being served.

While I understand the point that the Pope is making, I have a particular preference for the parables of Jesus such as we heard today. These are the parables that speak of seeds, of planting, of growth and of harvesting. I have often said that rather than the smell of the sheep, I know the smell of the soil.



As many may know, I have come to appreciate these images on planting, growth, and even harvesting - although that is limited to herbs - simply by working around the parish property. The first example Jesus used points out, however, an important distinction that must be understood. On the one hand, planting and harvesting depend on the effort an individual makes. In order for that plant to

have life and growth, it must first be put in place. The process that follows, the growth and development that takes place, mysterious as it is, depends upon the inherent nature of the plant, the inherent nature with which the plant was endowed by the Creator.

For there to be success in a garden or on a farm, or simply in a plot of herbs, there must be both the effort made in planting the seed or the plant in the ground, along with tending and nourishing of them, so that the process of growth that the inherent nature of the plant possesses can occur and thereby provide beauty or function.

Jesus uses the very same image, in order to convey an important consideration. If the kingdom of God, the reign of God, that is, the experience of the presence and action of our loving God in our lives and in our world, is to occur and to have an impact, a co-operative effort must be present. It is a two-fold process. We must do our part to accept the message Jesus declares. We must recognize that what gives the greatest meaning and dimension to our lives comes from a life lived in union with God. It comes from a relationship in which God is a significant part of the choices we make. This is the seed, the plant that we insert into the soil of our lives. Then, in ways we may not always realize or appreciate or understand, that presence of God, as being important to us, grows in the soil that we are and is productive in our lives. It is in this manner that the active presence and love of God is harvested in us.

Jesus announces the desire of our God to be united with us, to be actively present in our lives. But we must, as well, invite God's relationship with us. We must tend and nourish the

growth of that relationship within the soil of our lives in order to being about the harvest, the results, of that relationship.

I prefer these parables because of the enjoyment I find in working with the plants in the yard. Doing so, however, also puts me into contact with the nemeses of those plants and flowers: the weeds. They are persistent as they appear and re-appear. The smell of the soil, and the working of the soil of our lives likewise makes us confront the weeds of our poor choices and our selfish concerns. The effort is constant, but the elimination of those weeds allows the plant of a relationship with our Lord to flourish. What then results in our lives is a genuine revelation of our good and gracious God.