

11th Sunday of Ordinary Time “A Remedy for Doubts and Fears”

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Last weekend, we were in the 10th Sunday of Ordinary time. This weekend we are in, wait for it, the 11th Sunday of Ordinary Time. Hot dog! Of course, ordinary time isn't meant to be understood as mundane time but rather counted time (think ordinal numbers). However, I really should contact the marketing division at the Vatican. They could have come up with a better title for the liturgical season we are in because the readings so far have been splendid. This weekend we have Ezekiel proclaiming how a cedar shoot will be planted on a hill so to become the largest of cedars. We have St. Paul inviting us to walk by faith and not by sight. And we have Jesus talking about a little mustard seed growing into the largest of bushes where birds can find food and shelter. Let's begin with Ezekiel.

For Ezekiel, it is important to understand the context behind his message. He is writing during the lowest point in the bible for the people of Israel. The country was conquered by the Babylonians which resulted in the destruction of the temple and their subsequent exile which lasted well over a generation. This was a terrible time for the people of faith in Israel because they believed that a descendant of King David would be anointed by God to rule over all the kingdoms of the world. This was their understanding of the term “messiah” anyway, translated into Greek as the Christ. It is from the perspective of being a defeated people in exile that Ezekiel prophesied, “Israel will rise again!” Israel will rise again like a small, cut, defeated twig of cedar that will grow into the largest of trees standing majestic on top of a hill. At the time, there was not a lot of empirical evidence that Ezekiel could point at to demonstrate the veracity of his claim. For a defeated people, having hope in the future not only took faith, it took a lot of it.

In our Gospel reading, we have the arrival of the messiah Ezekiel foretold. And Jesus uses the same analogy as Ezekiel, speaking on how the Kingdom of God is like the smallest of seeds, the mustard seed. Carefully planted and cultivated, this little seed becomes the largest of bushes with branches that attract the birds of the sky. Of course, God's take on the prophesied messiah was a bit different from what the people of Israel imagined. The messiah wasn't to be a new King David that would defeat Babylonians or Romans. The messiah is the Son of God who offers salvation to the human race from the power of sin and death.

The tree on the hill Ezekiel prophesied can be seen as the Church, you see. When Jesus suffered and died for our sins on the cross, most of the disciples had already abandoned him. I mean, when thinking about the history of the Church, talk about a mustard seed! Then Easter happened, Jesus rose from the dead like he said he would. Then Pentecost happened, the descent of the Holy Spirit was poured out upon us. Then the Church happened, and a new parish church in Woodinville is thriving two thousand years later in a world where over a billion people identify themselves as Roman Catholic followers of Jesus. Do you see where I am going with this?

My friends, consider what St. Paul is trying to tell us when he invites us to walk by faith and not by sight. You and I know there is so much to worry about in our world today. There is so much that happens in our personal lives that can cause us all kinds of anxiety. We are challenged this weekend to consider the areas in our lives that we are called to walk by faith and not by sight. Name the anxieties you have about the future. Name the worries you that keep you up at night. When Ezekiel talks about the new Israel growing from a small cedar shoot into the greatest of trees and when Christ talks about the mustard seed growing into the largest of bushes, they are speaking to listeners who had tremendous doubts and fears. And we do too sometimes. When we contemplate our lives, we should consider that in God's eyes, we are very much like those seedlings. We all have the potential in us to grow into plants worthy of heaven. We all have real doubts and fears that we contend with along the way.

And so, what are your doubts and fears right now at home, at work, or with what you see in the news or maybe just what you see when you look in the mirror each morning? We can all do that sometimes. It is during these times of doubts and fears when Ezekiel shows us a cedar shoot that becomes the largest of trees. It is during these times when Jesus shows us a mustard seed that becomes a majestic bush. It is during times like these that the Church shows you the cross and an empty tomb that foreshadows our salvation. The big picture is this, the hope Christ offers us will not disappoint. We know this. We know this. Why? Because no matter what we face in life or what worries we face, how bless and better off we are when we turn our gaze to Jesus and walk by faith, not by sight!