

## 11<sup>th</sup> Sunday OT – **FATHER’S DAY** - (Year B) – June 17, 2018

EZ 17:22-24; PS 92:2-3, 13-14, 15-16; 2 COR 5:6-10; MK 4:26-34

Jesus is a profound **mystery**.

For instance: Jesus is both **God and man**. But he’s *not* half-and-half. He is **100% God**; and he is **100% man**—a truth that our limited human minds could not have devised on our own, and which—even though it has been **revealed** to us—we can **still** barely *fathom*.

The same goes for the **Trinity**—Jesus, the Second Person of the Trinity, is the **Son** of God. But he is also 100% God...just as the **Father** is 100% God...and the **Holy Spirit** is 100% God.

When we speak of “**mystery**” in the *Catholic* sense of the word, we do not mean “**a puzzle to be solved**”. “**Mystery**” in the Catholic sense means:

**“A divinely revealed truth whose very possibility cannot be rationally conceived before it is revealed and, after revelation, whose inner essence cannot be fully understood by the finite mind.”**

Pocket Catholic Dictionary, p. 275

In other words, we can know **something** about God—because he has revealed **something** of himself to us—but we can never know *everything* about God—in his **completeness**—because our **finite minds** are no more capable of containing the **infinite reality of God** than a **12 oz. glass** is capable of containing the *ocean*.

If we ever think that we **fully** understand God, then the “**god**” who we *think* we understand is **not** the *True God*.

The mysterious reality of the **Person of Jesus** also helps us understand the multifaceted nature of **Jesus’ parables** which can sometimes seem **confusing**, if not **perplexing**. We shouldn’t be surprised, however, that the **God-Man**—Jesus Christ—would tell parables that have **many more layers of depth** than we might comprehend at first glance...precisely because of **who** he is.

Here’s an example:

When Jesus told the **Parable of the Good Shepherd** in Chapter 10 of the **Gospel of John**, he made reference to **himself** as *both* the **gate** of the sheepfold and as the **Good Shepherd**.

When I first read this parable, I recall wondering, “**Well, Jesus, are you the *Good Shepherd* who leads his sheep in and out of the sheepfold *through* the gate or are you the *gate*? I don’t understand how you can be *both*.”**

Today’s parable is similar, in that it contains **symbols** that can have **multiple meanings**.

We heard Jesus say in **today’s Gospel**:

*“This is how it is with the kingdom of God; it is as if a man were to scatter seed on the land and would sleep and rise night and day and the seed would sprout and grow, he knows not how. Of its own accord the land yields fruit, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear.”* (Mk 4:26-28)

The question arises — at least in *my mind*:

What is the **seed** that Jesus refers to here?

Is it the **word of God** that Jesus sows in our hearts?

Or is it **something else**?

The answer is “**yes**” ... and “**yes**”. It is *both* the **word** he sows in our hearts...and something **else**...something *more*.

The **seed** is, indeed, **God’s word**, as our **Gospel Acclamation** — the “*Alleluia verse*” — proclaims today:

*The seed is the word of God, Christ is the sower.* (cf. Lk 8:11)

But the “seed” is also something **else**...something *more*.

And we get a clue to this something “**else**”, this something “*more*” in **Psalm 92**, which is today’s **Responsorial Psalm**, where it says:

*The just will flourish like the palm tree and grow like a Lebanon cedar. Planted in the house of the Lord they will flourish in the courts of our God, still bearing fruit when they are old...* (Ps 92:13-15, Grail)

This Psalm speaks of the **person**—the *just person*—being planted and growing—like a **seed**!

And here is where we see how the “**seed**”—like so many other symbols in Jesus’ parables—can **symbolize multiple things**, in this case, representing *both* the **Word of God**, planted in the heart of each individual Christian by *Christ, the sower* (cf. Lk 8:11); *and also* the **individual Christian** himself or herself *being a seed* that grows in a way “*he [or she] knows not how*” (cf. Mk 4:27), and who eventually bears fruit *for the benefit of others*.

In his parable, Jesus described **three major stages** of a seed’s growth: *the blade; the ear; then the full grain in the ear* (cf. Mk 4:28).

Here the **blade** signifies the seed of Faith first **sprouting** in our lives. The development of the **ear** from the **blade**, signifies the further maturing of the Faith. The **full grain** which forms in the **ear** of the plant, represents the **visible fruit of holiness**, which grows out of our deepening friendship with Jesus Christ.

So, let’s break this open further by considering **some** of the “**key words**” that Jesus plants in the human heart. Let’s jump back three chapters in **Mark’s Gospel** to hear the *first words Jesus spoke in his public ministry*:

*“This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.”* (Mk 1:15)

For the seed of **Christ’s word** to take root in our hearts, we must **clear** the soil—by **repenting** of our sins—and **prepare** the soil—by allowing it to be **fertilized** by the Gospel.

We are called to **repent** and then **accept** the **Gospel**—the truth that we are sinners, and that we have a Father in Heaven who so loves us, that he desires to free us from slavery to sin. Thus, he **sent his Son to rescue us**. But we must **follow** Jesus to **safety**—this Jesus, whose **words** in the **Gospel of Luke** help the seed of faith he has planted in our hearts **grow** and **develop**.

**Jesus said:** *“If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.”* (Lk 9:23)

To **deny ourselves** is to *submit to the pruning* of the great **vinedresser**, God the **Father**, whom Jesus described in such terms in the **15<sup>th</sup> Chapter of John’s Gospel:**

*“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch of mine that bears no fruit, he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.”* (Jn 15:1-2)

As we voluntarily submit our lives and our souls to the Father, by following Jesus, and leaving behind those things that hinder our **spiritual growth**, we begin to see the **spiritual fruit of holiness** blossom in our lives—*fruit that is intended to be shared with others and not kept to ourselves.*

As we **live** more like Jesus—by **following** him and **obeying** his commands—we learn to *love* more like Jesus, who **sacrificed** everything to save us. And Jesus held up this **self-sacrifice** for us as the **pinnacle of genuine love** when he said:

*“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you.”* (Jn 15:12-14)

And here we come to the **means** by which the **individual Christian**—in his or her very person—becomes a *seed for growth of the Kingdom*—by voluntarily laying down one’s life for others.

In the **2<sup>nd</sup> Century**, the Church Father **Tertullian** famously stated:

**“The blood of martyrs is the seed of the Church.”**

Why is this so?

Well, first of all, a life without God is a life without **ultimate objective** meaning or purpose.

Sure, even an **atheist** can have important short-term objectives to achieve—such as forming relationships and making a living. And **such objectives** do have **some meaning**.

But is that **all** there is?

Hustling around, struggling, working, earning, saving, amassing, just to have it all fizzle out when we take our last breath?

Is that **all** this life is *really* about?

Or is there something **more**?

History shows us that many who have achieved **great material success** in this life still end up being **unspeakably unfulfilled** despite having everything **the world** told them was the **recipe for happiness**.

That is one reason why **martyrdom** can have such a profound effect on the **Church's growth** because of its profound impact on others.

Martyrdom it is an unmistakably **visible** and **compelling** testimony to something **greater**—something **beyond** this **limited life**—something *promised to us by Jesus Christ*—a blessedly happy **eternal** life with the Father who loves us beyond our wildest imagination.

For someone who has believed that this life *is* all there is, and who experiences the **inevitable** frustration of seeking **complete fulfillment** in a world that can't **offer** it, the **possibility** of something greater, made supremely **evident** and **compelling** by a Christian willing to sacrifice *this* life to gain a **greater one** might just give the unbeliever enough pause to consider an **attractive alternative** to a **dead-end life of drudgery** with no reward...besides the **grave**.

Now, granted, there are those who either **cannot**—or who **choose not** to—believe that there is something beyond this life. But there are plenty who **will** be moved by such a compelling testimony as martyrdom, perhaps even to the point of exchanging their **old ways** to this **new hope**.

And here we can see the **divine wisdom** of these **words of Jesus**, also in **John's Gospel**:

*“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.”* (Jn 12:24)

Here, Jesus speaks of *laying down one's life*...which can take various forms, **including** martyrdom. But lest we think there is only one kind of martyrdom—**red** martyrdom—the **shedding of one's blood** to the point of **death**; let us be reminded of “**white martyrdom**”—the **bloodless martyrdom** of **suffering for our Faith without dying**, but with the intention of offering that **suffering and sacrifice** as *spiritual fruit* for the **good of others**...and the **glory of God**.

Jesus plants the seed of his **Living Word** in our hearts. When we allow the **seed of his word** to take root in our hearts, **we ourselves become seed** he can scatter for even further growth of the Kingdom of God—**a kingdom of truth and life, a kingdom of holiness and grace, a kingdom of justice, love, and peace** (cf. Preface of Christ the King).

This is the kind of Kingdom that **every human heart** was **created** for, and which every heart **desires**, even if an individual heart is ignorant of the ultimate **object** of its **deepest desire**.

It is the Kingdom of which those who are baptized into Christ have become **heirs—inheritors**.

It is a kingdom that **cannot** be found on **this** earth, in **this** life, but which is offered to **all who allow the seed of Christ's word** to be **planted** and **take root** in their hearts.

And **we** make that kingdom **visible** and **attractive** to others when they see the fruit that grows out of **our** love and friendship with **Jesus!**