

Fr. Curtis Miller June 12-13, 2021 Homily for the 11th Sun. in Ordinary Time

One of my professors in seminary taught us that when you're writing a homily, you should have the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other. What he meant was that we needed to connect what we read in the Bible to what was going on in the world and in people's lives. Well, that was pretty easy this week. I could have opened my Bible right up to the Book of Jonah and then opened the newspaper to read the story about a lobsterman off of Cape Cod who was swallowed by a whale. He dove down to check on a problem with one of his traps, when suddenly he felt something big hit him and everything went dark. He realized that a humpback whale, feeding on krill, had accidentally swallowed him. Neither of them was happy with the situation, so the whale surfaced and spewed him out onto the waves. He escaped with a few bruises and a story even more unbelievable than the stories fishermen usually tell.

More relevant to our readings this weekend, I heard the story of a pastor who made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, and he brought back a number of souvenirs to use to teach his congregation about the Bible. One of the items he brought back was a Ziploc bag of tiny mustard seeds. When he returned to the U.S., he filled out his card for Customs to declare what he was bringing back. The Customs officer stopped him and confiscated the bag of seeds. The pastor explained that he wasn't going to plant them, only use them as a teaching tool to explain this parable, but the officer still wouldn't let him have them back. He said it was too dangerous and could become an invasive species. If even one of those tiny seeds got out, it could grow and spread like wildfire. And he was right. The mustard seed produces a large bush, and it grows and spreads like a weed. But in a more profound sense, he was also right about the parable. If the tiny seed of faith gets out and we let it start to grow, it will spread like wildfire. It will take over our lives and spread to the people around us.

But sadly, the problem is too often that we don't let that seed of faith out. We keep it safely sealed up, only taking it out when we're here in Church, then carefully packing it away until next weekend. But if we live our faith in such a limited way, then we will never fulfill the mission Jesus entrusts to us of helping to spread the kingdom of God.

So how do we do it? By living out our faith with joy and conviction. We come here to Church each week, not as the one place to practice our faith, but as a place to be spiritually refreshed and encouraged by one another to live out our faith throughout the rest of the week.

This doesn't mean that we're pushy about our faith, but that we naturally let it be part of our lives. We pray grace before we eat a meal, we refrain from joining in gossip, we help people without looking for credit, and we tell people that we will pray for them when we know that they're going through a hard time. That opens the door. Maybe a co-

worker or neighbor will ask you a question about Jesus or our faith, or perhaps they will even ask about where you go to Church. We want to be ready for those moments, so let's try to always be learning more about God and the teachings of our Church. They are beautiful and life-giving, but if we don't know them well ourselves, then we won't be able to share it with anyone else.

You might be thinking, "That's easy for you; you're a priest." But the truth is that each of us goes to different places and meets different people. I can't go everywhere and meet everyone, but if we're all working together to spread Jesus' Good News, then we will spread our impact exponentially.

We might also be discouraged when we look around and see that there aren't as many people in Church as there were a few decades ago. How can we do all this work of spreading the kingdom when there are so few of us? Well, Jesus started with just twelve apostles, ordinary men. From their faithful witness, the Church has spread to more than a billion people, all over the world. We don't need to be big, famous, and powerful to have a positive impact. We just need to be faithful.

And God can do a lot with a little. Remember when Jesus miraculously multiplied the five loaves and two fish to feed over 5,000 people. The apostles looked at the little they had, but they put it all in Jesus' hands, and He made it more than enough. Pope St. John Paul II recalled this story when he visited Scotland in 1982, saying, "You feel conscious of your inadequacy... But what I say to you is this: place your lives in the hands of Jesus. He will accept you and bless you... beyond your greatest expectations! In other words: surrender yourselves, like so many loaves and fishes, into the all-powerful, sustaining hands of God and you will find yourselves transformed."

We might think that Jesus would have been more successful if instead of preaching in the wilderness to the poor, in the tiny nation of Israel, He had gone right to the Roman emperor, the most powerful man in the world, and performed miracles to convince him that He was God. Then he could have worked from the top down. But instead, Jesus chose to start small, to show His power by working through the poor and the weak. That is still how Jesus works. In the eyes of the world, none of us is big or important, but still Jesus has chosen us to be His disciples, and to go spread His kingdom. Let's go unleash our tiny mustard seeds of faith, so that we might do our part to help the Kingdom of God spread from our homes and neighborhoods to the ends of the earth.