

Commentary on the Gospel for Tue, Oct 29th 2013

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are as nothing compared with the glory to be revealed for us. Romans 8

I love the perspective Paul's words give us. But, sometimes the "sufferings of this present time" do get out of perspective and we forget about "the glory to be revealed to us."

I imagine Jesus was preparing his disciples for their ministry, when he told them about the Kingdom of God. It would be, he predicted to them, and prepared them to imagine, like mustard seed and like yeast in dough.

When I was a young child, my grandfather who grew up in Sicily, had a huge garden. I took great delight in watching him collect seeds from his harvest each year, dry them, and prepare them for planting the following year. Seeing the seeds all lined up on trays for drying - tomato, peppers, green beans, zucchini, squash, cucumber - gave me a great sense of how the garden worked. Mustard Seed But, it was mustard seed that really impressed me. My grandfather, who never went to a day of formal schooling, knew the gospels well. He would show me the mustard seed, putting some of these tiny seeds in his hand. Then he would blow them away with a dramatic puff, to impress upon me how small and light they were. The full grown mustard seed stalks were in his basement drying, so I had a vivid memory of how big a plant they produced. My grandfather would tell me that "Things were not always what they appeared to be." God, he would explain, was always with us, always working in ways we couldn't see, we couldn't understand. He said that his father grew vegetables and herbs and his great grandfather, and probably many generations before him, all planted seeds in the ground. He told me that over all these years, if there was rain and sun, and careful weeding, there would always be a harvest that produced more than they needed.

At the time, I'm sure I didn't have an inkling of an idea about how challenging life would be or how our faith and trust in God can be battered by the apparent absence of God or the lack of real growth of anything around us. I couldn't have imagined that I'd ever ask, "Can these small efforts ever really make a difference, let alone produce an abundant harvest?"

And, I remember watching my mother make dough. I was fascinated with how she would make sure the water was very warm - not too hot or too cool - as she put the yeast in the water, with just a bit of sugar. My sister and I would get very close to the bowl and just watch to see it happen. The small grains of yeast would slowly swell and rise to the surface and just explode. And as the foaming yeast

would bubble up, the sight and the smell were so exciting. Then, when the yeast was ready, she would pour it into the flour and begin to knead it. DoughAs she kneaded and kneaded the dough, adding a bit more flour every so often, we would marvel at how elastic and smooth the dough became. Finally, when it was just right, she would bless the dough, placing a small cross on top, before she covered the bowl with a towel and put it in a warm place to rise. We asked, "Mom, why do you bless the dough?" We knew the answer by heart, but we loved to hear her tell us that, though she did this work of preparing and kneading the dough, it was God's work that made it rise. We always wanted to peek under the towel and see how the dough was doing. It seemed that there was no change for what seemed to be "forever." But, then, as it always did, the dough had grown a little bit. And, before we knew it, the towel was pushed up by the large swollen dough.

I know I didn't understand at the time the profound mystery she was sharing with us. I am beginning to learn a bit of humility and patience before my efforts to do good - to be helpful to others, transform the world - or with what seems to me to be the very slow arrival of the reign of God. It is God who is working, laboring behind the scenes in so many ways. His kingdom will come. His will surely will be done.

Slow, imperceptible, natural, reliable, inevitable, awesome. That's what the Kingdom of God is like.

Dear Lord, let me place my trust in you more deeply today. Let me turn my attention, from time to time today, to your presence with me. Let me place my small efforts in your care, to grow, to be effective, to share your love. Let me be patient and trust in your ways. Free me from my need to fix too much, to control too much, to adjust your ways or to manage the outcome too much. Let me simply love those you have called me to love, to hear and care for those around me who are in need. Let me never forget the unjust social structures around me, my role in dismantling them, and to never forget those who are suffering because of these social structures that need to be changed. Let me be an instrument of your justice for everyone on the margins. May your Kingdom come and your will be done, through my hands and with your grace. Amen.

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