

Commentary on the Gospel for Wed, Jul 20th 2016

When I let the words of the first reading sink in, they give me reassurance that God is "in charge." God hopes for more than I can alone and knows more than I myself am aware. We are reminded that when filled with God's strength, we shall have no fear, no insecurities about how young or inexperienced we are, no second-guessing that we are alone or completely responsible for a giant task. As one who appreciates a bit of control in my life (even if I don't like to admit it), this can be difficult to accept on the surface level. But, deep down, I admit that I am reassured, comforted and relieved to be invited to trust in God's timeline and course of events.

Similarly, the Gospel reminds us of the seeds that are planted in many different kinds of soil. Some thrive, but many do not. The hardships and threats are real and prevalent. This parable is an excellent reminder of this same theme of trust. God is "in charge" and although we are co-creators (planting and nurturing seeds) in this world, we are called to trust and be patient that God's work will unfold on God's timeline.

These readings seem appropriate for this growing season here in Eastern Nebraska in the United States. Currently, much of my backyard garden is thriving, but there are still some uncertainties. A bunch of green tomatoes, ready to turn red any day. Pumpkin and squash stems and leaves that seem to be growing exponentially longer each day. Finicky eggplant plants that are struggling with height and have been visited by an insect that has left lots of little holes in the leaves. Plentiful strawberry plants that make me wonder if and when they will produce fruit. And yet, the difference from just eight or ten weeks ago is visibly different. I am always quite nervous and skeptical in early spring whether the investment of time, weeding, preparation and cost of purchasing seeds and seedlings will be worth it. Will any of this really grow or am I just wasting my time? I find hope and then along comes a hailstorm that sets things back. I feel like the sower, uncertain of the future of these plants and seeds...wanting control and assurance but still skeptical.

In the midst of political division, unrest and violence across the U.S. and world, I find myself doubting again, just like I have doubted with my backyard garden, just as I have doubted as I read this parable in the Gospel passage. I wonder if peace, justice and unification are at all possible. I wonder if the violence and division will ever end. I wonder what my role is, and whether my well-intentioned efforts will be fruitless. My prayer is for continued trust in God's omnipotence and authority. When I pray for the reassurance that I am not "in charge," the prayer attributed to slain Archbishop Oscar Romero (written by Bishop Ken Untener) directly my focus and my hope. The familiar prayer never seems to lose its relevance or its power for me. Perhaps it will speak to you, today, as well. As we continue our good efforts, which may not seem like enough, may we also journey together to trust more deeply in God's authority and timeline for bringing about the Kingdom of God here on Earth.

"The Romero Prayer"

It helps, now and then, to step back and take a long view.

The kingdom is not only beyond our efforts, it is even beyond our vision.

We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work.

Nothing we do is complete, which is a way of saying that the Kingdom always lies beyond us.

No statement says all that could be said.

No prayer fully expresses our faith.

No confession brings perfection.

No pastoral visit brings wholeness.

No program accomplishes the Church's mission.

No set of goals and objectives includes everything.

This is what we are about.

We plant the seeds that one day will grow.

We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise.

We lay foundations that will need further development.

We provide yeast that produces far beyond our capabilities.

We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that.

This enables us to do something, and to do it very well.

It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest.

We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker.

We are workers, not master builders; ministers, not messiahs.

We are prophets of a future not our own.

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