

ELEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

June 13, 2021 B

Facilitator: *Let us take a minute to consciously acknowledge that we are in the presence of God and ask him to help us to hear the Word he wants us to hear this week.*

Pause for a moment and then play a religious song.

Opening prayer: *O Lord, let your Scriptures be my chaste delight. O Lord, perfect me and reveal those pages to me! See, your voice is my joy. Give me what I love. May the inner secrets of your words be laid open to me when I knock. This I beg by our Lord Jesus Christ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. These are the treasures I seek in your books. (St. Augustine)*

Response to last week's Word: (Facilitator briefly recalls last week's Gospel.) *Let us spend a few minutes sharing how the Word we heard God speak to us last week has unfolded in our lives during the week.*

Facilitator reads focus statement: In the first and third readings, Ezekiel and Jesus use agricultural images to speak of God's mysterious presence in our midst and how his plan to save his people happens in a quiet and often invisible way. In the second reading Paul expresses his strong desire to please the Lord in all things.

Let us listen to God's Word to hear what it is he wants to say to us in these readings today. As you hear a word, you may want to underline it or write it down to remember.

Read the First Reading, the Psalm, and the Second Reading, pausing briefly after each one.

FIRST READING: Ezekiel 17:22-24

The prophet Ezekiel is seeking to give hope to the Israelites who are in exile, having lost their king, kingdom, and place of worship.

God promises to bring a new king from the house of David back into power. The "tender shoot" from the topmost branch of the cedar stands for a new king from the house of David. Jerusalem is the lofty mountain. The newly planted tree will bring forth many branches and bear much fruit (a reference to Israel's future greatness). Birds of every kind shall dwell beneath it (a reference to the security the people will experience when God restores Israel).

Then there is mention of a reversal of fortunes that God will bring about: "*Bring low the high tree, lift high the lowly tree.*" What is humbled can be exalted and what seems to triumph can be brought down. The presence and power of God at work in all these events are underlined in the final verse: "*As I, the Lord, have spoken, so will I do.*"

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 92

The image of the tree firmly planted and flourishing connects this Psalm to the first reading and the Gospel.

SECOND READING: 1 Corinthians 5:6-10

Paul compares his present 'bodily' existence with that which is to come, and for which he longs: "*I would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.*" After Paul became a 'soldier of Christ,' his body took some hard knocks; hence, it is understandable why he would prefer to be 'at home with the Lord.' Whether in this world or in the world to come, Paul's only desire is to live in accord with God's will. The reading ends with a sobering reminder that all will stand before Christ to be judged according to how they lived their lives on earth.

PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL

As we listen to this first reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our minds for the content.

**A participant reads the Gospel,
then all pause to reflect.**

As we listen to this second reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our hearts to what Jesus is saying to us. Be aware of what draws us in and what part of the Gospel might be a challenge to embrace. You may want to underline or write down the word you hear.

GOSPEL: Mark 4:26-34

Chapter 4 of Mark's Gospel is a series of parables used by Jesus to teach his audience about the kingdom or reign of God which he is inaugurating.

Parables address two very different realities and use one to throw light on the deeper meaning of the other. Parables also force the hearers to stretch their imagination to make connections they usually would not make.

In the first parable, Jesus uses the mysterious nature of seed growing to speak about the mysterious growth of God's kingdom. A man sows seeds in the ground and then goes off to do other things. In the meantime, the seeds gradually grow to full maturity. In a similar way, the reign of God takes root, grows and produces in secret, and perhaps in unexpected places. Growth is always the result of God secretly working in the hearts of people.

The point of the mustard seed parable is that small beginnings produce great things. The full grown tree, providing a place for the birds of the sky, may be a reference to the universal nature of the Church. The final statement about Jesus "explaining things privately to the disciples" may be a reference to the slowness of Jesus's disciples to understand his teaching.

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. Share with the group or person next to you what spoke to you most in the Gospel. With this first question, try to refrain from commenting on what others said. Just share what spoke to you and then move on to the next person.
2. Paul says that he would prefer to be away from his body and in heaven with the Lord. What can help us to become more detached from the passing things of this world? What, if anything, helps you?
3. Who has scattered seed in your life? In what ways have you benefited from the seed sowing of others?
4. "Our job is to scatter seeds, water the plants and leave the growth to God." To what extent do you let this be your approach to life?
5. In what ways have you "scattered seed"? Have you seen your efforts bear fruit?
6. Name 1 thing today's Gospel says to us that we disciples of Jesus need to heed/ act on.

JOURNALING

Having listened to God's Word and listened to others' reflections on it, take a quiet moment to reflect on what you are hearing God say to you. Your response will be what you bring to Eucharist on Sunday, asking Jesus to help you respond as he asks of you. When ready, jot down your reflections.

PRAISING WITH THE WORD

Facilitator: Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer.

Suggestion: *Jesus, help me to be more open to your Word in my life.*

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Share with the person next to you one way you can act on this week's readings. Suggestion: Become a sower of God's Word when opportunities present themselves.

CONCLUDING WITH PRAYERS OF PETITION, THANKSGIVING AND INTERCESSION

Facilitator: What are we grateful for? For what and for whom do we need to pray? Pray for all teachers and preachers of God's Word and for all who have turned away from God and the Church.

CLOSING PRAYER (TOGETHER)

Prayer of Native Americans

O Great Spirit, whose voice I hear in the winds,
And whose breath gives life to all the world, hear me!

I am small and weak.

I need your strength and wisdom.

Let me walk in beauty and make my eyes
ever behold the red and purple sunset!

Make my hands respect the things you have made

And my ears sharp to hear your voice.

Make me wise that I may understand

The things you have taught my people.

Let me learn the lessons you have hidden

In every leaf and rock.

I seek strength, not to be greater than my brother,

But to fight my greatest enemy – myself.

Make me always ready to come to you
with clean hands and straight eyes.

So when my life fades, as fading sunset,

My spirit may come to you without shame.

Amen.

From *Treasury of Prayers* by Father Eamon Tobin