

## Bible Study

### Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time, cycle B

**Opening Prayer:** (Sign of the Cross) “Lord our God, all truth is from you, for you alone are the source of wisdom. Give us the joy of hearing your voice in the words we read today and grant us the peace that comes with tasting the depth of your goodness. May our reflections lead us to know you better and to love you more. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.”

#### **Focusing Questions:**

1. What does it mean to be a person of hope?
2. Are YOU a person of hope? When did you experience hope last week?

#### **Commentary before the First Reading: Ezekiel 17:22-24**

The cedar tree was a symbol of the royal family of King David. That is the key image that God uses as He asserts his authority in this reading. God has rejected the unfaithful king, Zedekiah, under whose leadership many from Jerusalem and Israel were taken into exile in Babylon. To those in exile Ezekiel spoke these words of hope and encouragement.

Read the First Reading aloud.

1. In light of the information in the commentary, explain the meaning of the image in verses 22 and 23.
2. Which great city on a mountain is prophesied in verse 23 as the home to the future king?
3. Can you see 2 possible meanings of the prophecy to “bring low the high tree...and wither the green tree?” (Again, the commentary should help you with one of them; the Creed helps with the other.)
4. What would be the effect of the final words on a people living in despair?

#### **Commentary before the Second Reading: Second Corinthians 5:6-10**

This is a reading that we seldom hear on a Sunday because in most years it is superseded by Holy Trinity Sunday or the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ. However, some will recognize it as a reading that is occasionally used at funerals. In this reading also watch for the theme of hope while awaiting our true home.

Read the Second Reading aloud.

1. The Greek word for “appear” that St. Paul used in verse 10 can be translated either as “show up, make an appearance” or as “be revealed for who one really is.” The ambiguity is intentional. Rephrase the verse twice in your own words, using both of these meanings.
2. What is it in verse 7 that we are unable to see?
3. Which words give the image of this life as a time of being exiled from our true home?
4. What is the payment (“recompense”) that we will receive according to how we have lived?

#### **Commentary before the Gospel Reading: Mark 4:26-34**

We resume reading from Mark’s Gospel today, beginning shortly after Jesus explained the meaning of the Parable of the Sower. Chapter 4 contains all but one of Jesus’ parables recorded in Mark’s Gospel. Notice how the familiar images from the agricultural society in which Jesus lived still speak clearly to us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Like all seeds that are planted, their growth into a larger plant that produces more seeds is mostly a mystery, except perhaps to the most technical biologists. How the Word of God grows to propagate the Kingdom of God is also largely beyond our understanding, but an amazing thing to see as we look back on life.

Read the Gospel Reading aloud.

1. The first parable is found only in Mark’s Gospel. How would it have given hope to a person who felt that he/she was not doing enough to advance the Kingdom of God?
2. Read carefully – Who is the farmer to whom Jesus was really referring in the first parable?
3. What message of hope might the early Church have found in the second parable?
4. Why do you think Jesus almost never spoke about the Kingdom of God without parables and symbols?
5. And why do you think he explained his parables to the disciples, but not to the general public?
6. Which words or phrases in this reading give you hope?

### **Applying the Readings to our Daily Lives**

1. Our children learn in religion classes that “*the Kingdom of God is everywhere that people live in love, peace and justice.*” Where do you see signs of the presence of the Kingdom of God in our time?
2. Does it appear to you that the Kingdom of God is growing or that it is withering?
3. Think of the Kingdom of God in terms of your own spiritual life; how does the message of these readings apply to that?
4. Even though, as these readings proclaim, God is in control, we often try to be in control of our own lives as much as possible. Do you recall a time when you gave a situation over to God as a last resort and wished later that you had done so at the very beginning?
5. If, in fact, God *is* in control, to what extent do we have any control or influence over our own destiny?
6. What are some of your deepest, strongest hopes?
7. Who needs to hear a word of hope from you this week?

### **Closing Prayer**

To you, O Lord, we raise our eyes, to you enthroned in heaven. For you alone are our hope; in you we put all of our trust. On you we shall keep our focus until you show us your favor and bring your Kingdom to fulfillment in us. With your grace we will do that which is your holy will, that which is right and just, that which honors you alone. Bless us with your grace and sustain our hope for eternal life. We ask this through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.” (Sign of the Cross)