



OFFICE OF THE ARCHBISHOP

Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year B

Homily

[*Ezekiel 17: 22-24; Psalm 92; 2Corinthians 5:6-10; Mark 4:26-34*]

We have become rather accustomed lately to what are called on-demand services. For a while now we have had access to on-demand streaming on our televisions or devices. Especially during the months of the pandemic, there has been a growth in on-demand delivery services for groceries, meals, or practically anything else we might want. At the centre of all of this is the individual consumer, who is now increasingly in the habit of saying, “I demand; you provide, and you will do so according to the timeline I want.” It is growing to the point where even “instant” takes too long.

The scriptural texts for this mass caution us against having the same expectations of God, as if to say, “What I want or demand, God must provide, and without delay.” Well, God is not “on-demand” in that sense. He loves us and is attentive to our every need, of course. But God knows us better than we know ourselves. God is active in every event of our lives, constantly pouring out blessings and gifts upon us, His beloved children, but moving along His timeline, not ours, and in accord with His plan for us and the world.

Now, this is not the first time we’ve heard this, but it strikes me as especially urgent that we remember and hold onto it now, if we are to find consolation and hope in the difficult circumstances in which we currently find ourselves. What I mean is this: We are all still reeling from the discovery of what are believed to be Indigenous children’s remains in Kamloops and the murder of a Muslim family in London. In response, our on-demand perspective will seek answers and actions, and expect them to be delivered without delay. From the perspective of human relationships, that is appropriate. We rightly expect satisfactory answers and timely actions from those responsible for the wrongdoing, including, of course, institutions under Catholic administration. When these or other tragedies strike, we might also, though, re-direct our on-demand cries towards God. If it seems that God is not responding as we think He should, and according to the timeline we assign Him, we can easily lose heart, grow despondent, and even question our faith. The parables of Jesus assure us that God is steadily at work among us, to overturn our worldly kingdom of injustice, hatred and division by establishing His heavenly one of justice, love, and peace, yet does so in ways that we do not easily see. This assurance of God’s presence and action is the basis for abiding hope, especially when all that we can see disheartens us. So, let’s take a look at the parables.

Observe first that our Lord is using them to explain the theme that is central to all of his teaching: the kingdom of God. This term refers to God’s sovereign rule over the hearts and minds of all people. It is entirely different from worldly exercises of power, such as have been recently contemplated by members of the G7, for example. God’s kingdom holds sway in the human heart, and takes hold the more we surrender in faith and trust to His rule of love in our lives. But ever since the sin of Adam and Eve, humanity has been marked by a tendency to self-rule, to a self-centered on-demand mentality that issues inevitably in the myriad transgressions of God’s law that lead to injustice and suffering. All that God has done in history – his wondrous deeds among

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the ancient Israelites, the sending of his Son born of Mary, the death and resurrection of Jesus, and the subsequent gift of the Holy Spirit now at work in our lives – has been for the purpose of summoning His people away from self-rule toward surrender to His reign. What Jesus emphasizes in these two parables is that God, in all His actions, takes His time, acts at moments He knows are the right ones, and often in ways imperceptible to us.

In the parable of the mustard seed, Jesus observes that it is the smallest of all seeds, yet grows into “the greatest of all shrubs where birds safely nest in its shade.” God is at work in and through the small and seemingly insignificant events in our lives to move us away from the on-demand mentality that leaves everyone exposed to the scorching heat of selfishness, toward the protective shade of His rule. That God’s working will not always be immediately evident to us is the point of the first parable, illustrated by the slow, steady growth of wheat without the farmer knowing how or having anything to do with it; he only planted the seed. God Himself has even sown the seed by speaking His Word, above all in Jesus, and now is mysteriously and steadily at work by the Holy Spirit to bring His plan to fulfillment in our lives and in the entire unfolding of history.

If we lose sight of this way that God works, then our attention gets focused only on what is immediately before our eyes. When all we can see is tragedy, it is easy to lose hope. Pope Francis once put it this way. When a tree falls, the noise of its crash so captures our attention that we forget the silent and steady growth of the whole forest. There are plenty of crashes vying for our attention right now, easily causing us to forget God’s steady and silent working. This is not to say that God causes the crashes; the ones capturing our attention right now are clearly the result of sin. It is to say, though, that God will not allow sin to have the last word; He will not permit these or any tragedies to thwart the coming of His kingdom. His seemingly slow and assuredly steady work continues. Our part is to give up any idea that God is on demand to us, and accept rather that we must always be on demand to Him, ready to surrender to His loving rule and accept the role He assigns to each of us to serve the coming of His kingdom. That role is to persist in sowing good works, however difficult and disheartening the circumstances, trusting that God is at work in and through us to give the growth and bring His plans to fulfillment.

When we do this, God will make great things happen. That’s the promise God made long ago through Ezekiel, and affirmed by His Son Jesus in these parables. So, in this Eucharist, let us once again surrender our whole lives through Christ to the Father, and pray that His kingdom take full hold in our hearts and in those of all people. With full confidence in God’s saving activity among us, let us in faith ask God to demand of us what He will and give us what we need to do as He demands.

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St. Joseph’s Basilica
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