

As we celebrate Father's Day, I am reminded of the important role my parents and grandparents played in handing down the faith I hold dearly. My father was not what most people would consider an outwardly religious man, he swore, he didn't attend mass on Sundays, and he rarely spoke of his faith. Yet, he encouraged my faith, and he and my mother sacrificed to send my sister and I to Catholic schools. While he may not have attended mass on Sundays, he taught me to love God and to treat all whom I encountered with respect and dignity. He taught me to speak out for social justice and help the underdog. My family prepared the soil where my faith could grow and mature. Actions often speak louder than words.

In our Gospel reading today, Jesus gives us two beautiful parables to explain what the kingdom of God is all about. First, he spoke of the miracle of life involving the cooperation between humanity and God. The farmer plants the seed, but the growth is in God's hands. Once the soil is prepared and the seed is planted, the farmer must wait for it to germinate and begin the process of maturity and growth.

The people who heard Jesus tell this parable could relate to the circle of life. They were farmers; they were dependent upon the harvest and the health of their animals. The farmer works hard during the day, but is unable to make the seed grow into a plant and produce a harvest. It is ultimately God who causes the growth.

The point Jesus is making is that the Kingdom of God is ultimately in God's hands. We, the workers in the vineyard must do our best to create the proper environment for growth. In our own imperfections, we plant seeds of faith by our actions and our deeds, but it is God who causes the growth. Together, with God's help, we build the Kingdom of God by living our faith. Alone, we are limited in what we can do, but with God we can do great things.

With the second parable, Jesus explained that faith is like a tiny mustard seed. This tiny seed, when cultivated and nurtured, grows into a sturdy tree that provides shelter and shade from the struggles of life. At birth we are born with the seed of faith planted deep within our being. The seed is watered at our baptism and nourished by those who've encouraged us

and loved us. We provide the nourishment for our faith by prayer, by eating at this table, the Table of the Lord, and with our deeds and actions.

When neglected, the seed of faith languishes, but it never dies. Prayer, the Eucharist, and good deeds activate that seed, and with God's hand, it flourishes and strengthens. Each of us is invited by God to take part in building the Kingdom. By living our faith, we not only sow seeds of faith in others, but in so doing, we also strengthen our own faith.

A life of faith can be a struggle. It is not always easy to keep our egos in check or to tame our anger. It is not always easy to choose to do the right thing rather than the easy thing. It is not always easy to act with compassion and forgiveness. It is not always easy to resist temptation and to act with justice. We can't do it alone, and that is why we have the Holy Spirit to fill us with grace and to strengthen us when we struggle.

That is why we are part of a community of faith that journey together toward the Kingdom of God. Each of us has a part to play in our own unique way, but faith is not lived in isolation. Faith flourishes in a community centered on God, much like our small faith community. Together, you and I, walk with God and together, with God's help and grace, we build the Kingdom of God one day at a time. We may stumble and fall, we may let our faith whither at times, we may be disappointed in those we love, but God's hand is always there to strengthen and guide us.

I want to close with a brief quote from St. Anthony of Padua. We just celebrated his feast day on Wednesday and he was truly a guidepost leading others toward God. He said: "Actions speak louder than words; let your actions speak and your words teach." Amen!