

Commentary on the Readings for Sunday, June 17, 2018

The 11th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Have you ever heard someone say, "*I was saved at the service today,*" or yesterday, or some other specific time or date? They appear to be happy or pleased with this event; almost as if it were a lightning strike that didn't harm them. Unfortunately for them, as we will learn in the readings today, our salvation is not a one moment in time gift. It is something that we might recognize with a starting point in our spiritual lives; but, in most cases and with most people, it starts out very small and if nourished, it will grow as a tree grows, slowly but continuously. Let us see how the readings support this.

The **First Reading** is from the *Book of the Prophet Ezekiel (17:22-24)*. In this passage, the Prophet, in speaking for God, uses the metaphor of a tree branch for the renewal of faith in the Jewish people near the end of the Babylonian Exile (6th century BC). The tender shoot, which represents the fragile Judaism, comes from the "topmost branches" that only God could reach. When he plants this shoot, it will eventually grow into a mighty tree that "*shall put forth and bear fruit.*" However, we must recognize that it will take time and nourishment for all of this to happen, and it did.

The **Responsorial Psalm (92:2-3, 13-16)** is a prayer meditating on the development of one's faith over time. It mentions giving thanks, singing praises, proclaiming kindness and other acts of faith and devotion that are the nourishment our faith needs to grow. It ends with the realization and declaration of *how good is the Lord*, which recognizes that we are the seedling and God is the planter.

The **Second Reading** is from St. Paul's *Second Letter to the Corinthians (5:6-10)*. In this letter, Paul is telling the Corinthians (and us today) that it takes courage to be a true and productive Catholic/Christian, and that we must "*walk by faith and not by sight*" to fulfill what God is asking of us. We cannot expect to be granted the gift of faith without following through with what God, through Jesus Christ, is asking of us, and our fulfilling whatever that might be. Again, faith and salvation are not a "one-time thing." They are a continuous process until we "*appear before the judgement seat of Christ.*"

The **Gospel Reading** for this Sunday is from *Mark (4:26-34)*. In these two brief parables, Jesus sums up what we have discussed above, as well as other writers: that the **Kingdom of God** (which is another way of saying sincere faith and/or salvation) begins like a tiny seed planted within our heart that takes hold of the nourishment surrounding it and begins to grow; slowly at first, but with continuous attention, it will grow faster and stronger and finally bear fruit as intended.

The essence of all of the above readings is to make us aware that we cannot sit back and say, "*I have been saved and therefore, I need not do anything more.*" As we have said here many times, "*Our faith, like our life, is a gift from God. What we do with it is our gift to Him.*"
Something to think about during your prayer time this week!

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