

11th Sunday In Ordinary Time, Year B

Ezekiel 17: 22-24

Today we hear God asserting his sovereignty in no uncertain terms. In the lines preceding this poetry, Ezekiel delivers God's rebuff to King Zedekiah, who had angered God by breaking a covenant and refusing to cooperate with his plan.²

22 Thus says the Lord God: I too, will take from the crest of the cedar, This is a symbol of the royal line of David.² from its topmost branches tear off a tender shoot, The prophecy is concluded with a messianic announcement. God will plant a new "tender shoot." After it becomes "a majestic cedar," all nations will enjoy its protection.³ and plant it on a high and lofty mountain; The Lord will restore Israel under a messianic King from the same Davidic dynasty.¹

23 on the mountain heights of Israel I will plant it. It shall put forth branches and bear fruit, and become a majestic cedar. Birds of every kind shall dwell beneath it, every winged thing in the shade of its boughs. "The same words are used in the account of the flood about all sorts of birds entering Noah's ark. It points therefore to the eschatological nature of the oracle after the exile, just as after the flood everything will be completely new, although it will derive from something that already existed. Also, the reference to "birds of every sort" points to the catholic nature of the new Israel. It is no surprise therefore that our Lord should use similar imagery to describe the Kingdom of God: it is like a grain of mustard seed that grows and "becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches."⁴

24 And all the trees of the field These refer to the nations of the earth.² shall know that I, the Lord, bring low the high tree, lift high the lowly tree, wither up the green tree, and make the withered tree bloom. The regal power of this line sets the stage for the final assertion that as God says, so will God do.² As I, the Lord, have spoken, so will I do.

2 Corinthians 5:6-10

6 Brothers and sisters: We are always courageous, although we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord,

7 for we walk by faith, not by sight. Paul speaks of a confidence that defies logic, a confidence sustained by "faith," not by "sight." In worldly terms, that's nonsense. Only what can be seen (at least with scientific instruments) and measured is real. All else is wishful thinking. For Paul, faith provides as solid a foundation as concrete.² A rule of the Christian life on earth, where Christ is present but hidden in the Scriptures, the Sacraments, and our souls. Only in eternity will our faith give way to the vision of God "face to face".⁵

8 Yet we are courageous, and we would rather leave the body and go home to the Lord. To leave the body here refers to the intermediate state between bodily death and bodily resurrection. During this temporary phase, the souls of the righteous enjoy the presence of God even though their bodies lie buried in a grave. It is important to note that, for Paul, absence from the body does not mean our presence with the Lord will be automatic or immediate. Judgment is the first thing to follow death, and for the saints whose works are judged imperfect, a process of spiritual purification will be needed before they enter the fullness of glory. This transitional state is called Purgatory.⁵

9 Therefore, we aspire to please him, whether we are at home or away. In order to possess Christ in heaven we must strive to please him on earth. On the Day of Judgment, he will review every one of our thoughts, words, and deeds performed in the body.⁵

¹⁰For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may receive recompense, according to what he did in the body, whether good or evil. Our recompense will be based not on the gifts with which we entered the world, but on what we've accomplished with them by the time we leave it.²

Mark 4: 26-34

²⁶Jesus said to the crowds: "This is how it is with the kingdom of God; it is as if a man were to scatter seed on the land

²⁷and would sleep and rise night and day This spans several months, and by the time the sprouting "seed" meets the "sickle," an entire season has passed.² and through it all the seed would sprout and grow he knows not how. Farmers spare no effort to prepare the ground for the sowing; but once the grain is sown there is nothing more they can do until the harvest; the grain develops by itself. Our Lord uses this comparison to describe the inner strength that causes the Kingdom of God on earth to grow up to the day of harvest, that is, the Day of the Final Judgment.⁶

²⁸Of its own accord the land yields fruit, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. The maturing grain signifies our increase in virtue. First, the seeds of good intentions are sown; these gradually bring forth the blade of repentance and ultimately the mature ear of charitable works. When established in virtue, we are made ripe for God's harvest.⁷

²⁹And when the grain is ripe, he wields the sickle at once, for the harvest has come."

³⁰He said , "To what shall we compare the kingdom of God The Kingdom of God also refers to the action of grace in each soul: God silently works a transformation in us, whether we sleep or watch, causing resolutions to take shape in our soul—resolutions to be faithful, to surrender ourselves, to respond to grace—until we reach "mature manhood".⁶ or what parable can we use for it?

³¹It is like a mustard seed that, when it is sown in the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on the earth.

³²But once it is sown, it springs up and becomes the largest of plants and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the sky can dwell in its shade." The main meaning of this parable has to do with the contrast between the great and the small. The seed of the Kingdom of God on earth is something very tiny to begin with but it will grow to be a big tree. Thus we see how the small initial group of disciples grows in the early years of the Church and spreads down the centuries and becomes a great multitude "which no man could number" (Rev. 7:9). This mysterious growth which our Lord refers to also occurs in each soul: To allow the mercy of God to exalt us, to make us grow, we must make ourselves small and humble. ⁶

³³With many such parables he spoke the word to them as they were able to understand it.

³⁴Without parables he did not speak to them, but to his own disciples he explained everything in private.

Some of the material for this commentary was taken from: (1) "St. Joseph Edition The New American Bible," 1970, (2) "Workbook for Lectors, Gospel Readers, and Proclaimers of the Word 2012" by Graziano Marcheschi with Nancy Seitz Marcheschi, (3) "Old Testament Reading Guide: The Book Of Ezekiel" by James C. Turro, (4) "The Navarre Bible: Major Prophets 2004", (5) "Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The First and Second Letters of Saint Paul to the Corinthians" with Introduction, Commentary, Notes, and Study Questions by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, (6) "The Navarre Bible: St. Mark 1989" and (7) "Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Gospel of Mark" with Introduction, Commentary, Notes, and Study Questions by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch.

In loving memory of Peg Schneller, who compiled these commentaries.