



**June 14, 2015**

**Eleventh Sunday of Ordinary Time**

*"The reign of God is like a mustard seed..." Mark 4:30*

Dear Friends;

The Chinese bamboo seed is very unusual. It remains buried in the ground for five years before any shoot appears above the ground. When the bamboo finally emerges from the ground it grows to a height of nine feet in six weeks! Its elaborate root system makes it a very durable and pernicious plant. It is very difficult to get rid of it. I know this from experience. When I was in college I worked with a friend doing landscape maintenance. It used to be popular to plant it in Southern California before people realized how invasive it is. One of the worst jobs we had was to try and remove bamboo which had taken over a side yard. The roots were everywhere I am sure the owners of that house are still digging up bamboo.

The mustard seed and plant are similar to bamboo. Mustard like bamboo is almost impossible to stop. Each spring, we in California see the hills and fields covered in the yellow flowered herb. It is everywhere. There is no stopping it. And multitudes of birds do find shelter in the waist-high plants.

Jesus uses images from nature to speak to us about God. The parables of Jesus challenge us to expand our understanding. In the image of the mustard seed Jesus is telling us a couple of things about the nature of God.

The first thing that the mustard image tells us is there is no stopping God, there is no stopping the love of God and the reign of God's justice. We may think we can plow it under or ignore it but it keeps coming back at us. It is kind of pernicious. The love of God continually pursues us whether we like it or not.

The other challenge of Jesus is to imagine how large is the reign of God? Like the mustard seed it may start out small. We may start with the realization that "God loves me." But that small start must grow into something larger if it is to live.

When my dog, Kylie is with me at the office we will take a break now and then. She likes to walk by the field next door. In the spring it was very exciting for her. The field was covered with mustard and alfalfa. The plants stood over her head and came up to my chest. What made it so exciting for her was she could hear and smell the multitude of birds living in the branches.

What is Jesus saying with the image of the birds of the sky nesting in the branches of the mustard plants? He is challenging us. Is our understanding of the reign of God small and selective only admitting a few? Do we only listen to our own opinions and those who agree with us? Or is our vision of the reign of God expansive like that of Jesus large enough to shelter all the varieties of birds. The choice is up to the listener.

However if we choose to be small and selective we will be surprised. In the end, the love of God which pursues everyone like bamboo and mustard will not be stopped until the universe is embraced by love.

Peace,

*Fr. Ron*