



June 17, 2012
Eleventh Sunday Ordinary Time
Fathers' Day

"To what shall we compare the reign of God, or what parable can we use for it? It is like a mustard seed that, when it is sown in the ground, is the smallest of all seeds on the earth. But once sown, it springs up and becomes the largest of plants..."—Mark 4:30-32

Dear Friends;

A couple of summers, when I was in college, I worked with a friend of mine, Steve, who had a landscape maintenance business. We hedged bushes and mowed lawns. Once in a while we had to redo completely a yard and install new plants and irrigation system.

At one time it was popular to plant bamboo in Southern California. Bamboo is almost impossible to control or get rid of it. If your neighbor has bamboo you will soon have it. It spreads like grass and grows like a weed. It uproots concrete walks, knocks over fences and takes over everything. It is pernicious. I can still remember trying to get rid of bamboo from some of the yards for which we cared.

I read recently that the seed of the bamboo plant germinates in the ground for up to five years. During this time it is developing underground a huge root system. When the roots are mature the plant will then shoot up to nine feet tall in eight weeks. No wonder it is so difficult to contain!

It is just such an image that Jesus uses to describe God. When Jesus says "to what shall we liken the Kingdom of God" he is not speaking of a place but a person. This is why many scholars will translate it as the "reign of God." Heaven is our relationship with God. As Pope John Paul II once stated heaven is not so much a place as a "state of being." And so the reign of God, heaven, begins here and now, in loving relationship.

The nature of our partner in this relationship is relentless and pernicious. Jesus speaks of this in the two images from the Gospel of Mark today. In the first image the guy who sows the seed is a lazy farmer. He has not cultivated or nurtured what he has planted, but the seed sprouted anyway and produced.

In the second image Jesus uses mustard and its seed. We in California are familiar with this image. Each spring our hillsides are covered with the yellow flowers. The mustard plants grow almost as tall as a person. Wild life especially birds nest in the mustard covered fields and hills.

According to a legend it was Blessed Junipero Serra, the Franciscan missionary, who brought mustard to California. It is said he scattered its seed wherever he went throughout the state. He loved the flowers in the spring because it reminded him of his native Majorca in Spain. Two hundred years later, every spring, the state is covered in mustard. I don't think you could get rid of it even if you wanted to.

Jesus is saying God is relentlessly pursuing us in love. Like mustard or bamboo God's love is pernicious and persistent. Even if we are like a lazy farmer who does nothing to cultivate his seed the fruit of God's love will still manifest itself for our benefit. God will not stop seeking us in love. This is the Good News of the Gospel.

Today we also congratulate all our Fathers. One of our most treasured images of God is that of loving Father. Jesus even addressed God using an affectionate Aramaic word for Father, Abba. We wish all our Dad's the happiest of Fathers' Day!

Peace,

Fr. Ron