

11th Sunday of the Year

Ez 17: 22-24; II Cor 5: 6-10; Mk 4: 26-34

BEFORE & AFTER

Before and after photos are often used by companies to show the effectiveness of their products.

There will be a picture of an obviously overweight and unhappy looking individual and then next to it there will be a picture of the same person physically fit, thinner, and self-confident.

We then learn that the amazing change was due to that person taking a certain supplement, using a particular piece of exercise equipment, or following a recommended diet program.

Of course, if you carefully read the small print below such photos you learn that such results are not necessarily typical. But those pictures attract our attention. They make us imagine such an outcome could be ours.

In this Sunday's Gospel (Mark 4:26-34), we hear Jesus tell two parables that relate to before and after situations.

In the first parable we hear about a man who scatters seed and after a time it yields a tremendous harvest, though "he knows not how."

Then in the second parable we learn about a mustard seed, "the smallest of all the seeds on the earth" that grows into "the largest of plants...so that the birds of the sky can dwell in its shade."

Certainly, very dramatic before and after situations. Scattered seed produces a great harvest, and the smallest of all seeds produces an immense plant.

While we often think of the seed as representing the word of God, we learn in Sunday's Gospel that Jesus tells those parables to teach us about the kingdom of God. He begins by saying, "This is how it is with the kingdom of God."

That kingdom grows and flourishes in a wondrous way. What it was like at its beginning is amazingly different from how it is today.

If we consider the kingdom of God in terms of the Church, we know that to be true. The Church began as a small, insignificant seed planted in the soil of Judea. Today it is spread throughout the world. It has grown from a handful of disciples to billions of Christians spanning some 2,021 years.

But the kingdom of God refers not only to the Church, it also refers to the action and presence of God in our lives.

As Jesus tells us, "The coming of the kingdom of God cannot be observed, and no one will announce, 'Look, here it is,' or, 'There it is.' For behold, the kingdom of God is among you." (Lk 17:20-21). Or as the Revised King James translation puts it, "For behold, the Kingdom of God is within you."

The Kingdom of God comes into our lives when we welcome the Lord into our hearts and allow ourselves to be moved by the Holy Spirit. By doing so we are slowly changed into those holy people that God calls us to be.

This Sunday might be a good day for us to consider our "before and after photos." A day for us to consider, our present relationship with Christ and his Church, and how different our lives would be, if the Lord had not touched us, not blessed us with the gift of faith, and not nourished us with Word and Sacrament.

Sometimes, unless we see a before and after photo, we may not appreciate how much we have changed for the better, how much we have grown as Christians because God is working in our lives.