

11th Sunday of the Year B

First Reading Ezekiel 17:22-24

The Lord says this: "From the top of the cedar, from the highest branch I will take a shoot and plant it myself on a very high mountain. I will plant it on the high mountain of Israel. It will sprout branches and bear fruit, and become a noble cedar. Every kind of bird will live beneath it, every winged creature rest in the shade of its branches. And every tree of the field will learn that I, the Lord, am the one who stunts tall trees and makes the low ones grow, who withers green trees and makes the withered green. I, the Lord, have spoken, and I will do it."

Second Reading 2 Corinthians 5:6-10

We are always full of confidence, then, when we remember that to live in the body means to be exiled from the Lord, going as we do by faith and not by sight – we are full of confidence, I say, and actually want to be exiled from the body and make our home with the Lord. Whether we are living in the body or exiled from it, we are intent on pleasing him. For all the truth about us will be brought out in the law court of Christ, and each of us will get what he deserves for the things he did in the body, good or bad.

Gospel Mark 4:26-34

Jesus said, "This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man throws seed on the land. Night and day, while he sleeps, when he is awake, the seed is sprouting and growing; how, he does not know. Of its own accord the land produces first the shoot, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. And when the crop is ready, he loses no time: he starts to reap because the harvest has come." He also said, "What can we say the kingdom of God is like? What parable can we find for it? It is like a mustard seed which at the time of its sowing in the soil is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet once it is sown it grows into the biggest shrub of them all and puts out big branches so that the birds of the air can shelter in its shade." Using many parables like these, he spoke the word to them, so far as they were capable of understanding it. He would not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything to his disciples when they were alone.

Meditation

French children learn a legend of a saintly man exiled by the emperor to Périgord in France. Later repentant, this ruler sent the holy man sixty-six camels laden with provisions. When a child heard this story in religion class she was surprised that there were no more camels in Périgord. The teacher replied, "My child, we no longer deserve them..." This answer illustrates the frustration of those who have not lost a taste for the triumphant Church. Disturbed by declining Church attendance and by the growing secularism of society, they reject the contemporary world. With its dismissal of the past and its disdain for ecclesiastical display, our culture has ceased to deserve the glories and miracles of the centuries of Christendom. That is why there are no longer any camels in France. The parables of the seed that grows by itself and the mustard seed should calm their anxiety. God is not neglecting his work. His reign of salvation continues to expand far beyond its tiny beginnings. The death of Jesus, the grain of wheat cast into the earth to bear much fruit, is the condition for its growth. This the Church must never forget. So we must keep trust and remain open to the changes which affect Christian life. In the diaspora condition, the Church returns to its sources. We remember the first Christians living out the gospel in a hostile society. They had no powerful organization to support them. They had only the power of Spirit-filled witness to win humanity to Christ.