

Want to see a miracle? Take a small seed; put it under several inches of dirt. Give it sun light, water, and fertilizer. It doesn't matter that the ground is a zillion times the weight of the seed. The seed will push it back! This is nothing less than a miracle illustrating the power of a seed.

Let's take another particular type of seeds. It is Chinese bamboo seeds. The seeds lie buried in the soil for five years before any shoots appear above the ground. One may think that the seeds went bad or rotten. However, after continuously watering the ground and putting manure on it for five years, the seed miraculously sprouts. It took five long years for the seeds to sprout but in just 6 weeks the bamboo plants grow as tall as 9 story building. How come? Botanists say that unseen and unknown, the seeds germinate and develop strong roots that eventually break out and produce tall bamboos.

The focus of the mission of Jesus was Kingdom of God. Again, and again, he tried to teach and explain about the Kingdom of God. In some parables Jesus compares the Kingdom of God with a vineyard.

In today's Gospel Jesus compares the growth of the kingdom of God with the mystery of seeds by two parables. In the first parable, explains the mystery of growth. The farmer scatters the seeds. The seeds are capable of sprouting and growing even if it takes 5 years like Chinese bamboo seeds. The farmer does not know how it grows. He does not make it grow. He cannot stop its growth. It is God who makes it grow. The Kingdom of God is like this. We can't see the growth of it. We can't stop the growth of it. But, like the farmer we have to wait with patience and hope. Sometimes long years of patience is required like the case of Chinese bamboo seeds.

In the second parable Jesus says that the Kingdom of God is like a tiny mustard seed which grows to become the greatest of all shrubs. Mustard seed was perhaps the smallest seed at the time of Jesus. With proper nutrients it could grow into large plants against all the odds.

What did Jesus mean by the Kingdom of God? Of course, every careful reader of the New Testament knows, the kingdom is not about geography or some static place; it is about the dynamic reality of God's presence and power within the creation and within the lives of God's people.

It starts from the smallest beginnings in the hearts of men and women who are receptive to God's word. And it works unseen and causes a transformation from within and grows like mustard seeds. In the case of some people, it takes longer time to sprout and grow.

We can clearly see the examples of these parables in the growth of the church. The tiny

seed sown by Jesus in Palestine 2000 years ago has grown into a big tree covering almost all the world. In my part of India, the first seed of the Catholic faith was in 1886. In a little over 130 years this seed has grown into big tree with 12 dioceses and one Archdiocese and full of local vocations to priesthood and religious life. But, again growth of the Church takes time just as the Chinese bamboo seeds. For example, the first seed of Christianity was sown in India 2000 years ago by the Apostle Thomas himself. But it is taking a long time to grow and cover whole of India. Why? Today's parables give the answers.

The parables of the growing seed and the parable of the mustard seed both call to mind the importance of God's grace in our lives and in the building of the kingdom of God. God's grace moves mysteriously in ways that we cannot comprehend or grasp. We plant seeds though our words and actions, but we need to remember is that God is in control and not us. We are collaborators but it is God who is the builder. Thus, the kingdom of God grows mysteriously, and we are called to trust in God's presence even when times are dark and difficult. We are called to go beyond calculations, forecasts, tangible results, and to surrender to God's plans and not be so caught up with our own. We are called to place ourselves in God's loving hands and to allow him to use us as he sees fit in the building of his Kingdom of peace, justice, and love.

We might sometimes get discouraged and disheartened to see slow growth of God's Kingdom. Just like anyone not knowing about Chinese bamboo seeds will get discouraged. Instead of growth of God's Kingdom and its values, we continue to see racism, oppression, hatred, violence, intolerance, killing of unborn and so on. But we cannot and should not give up. If we are truly committed to living out the gospel values in our lives, then even though we might not see the results, it is possible that we have no idea of how our words and actions are germinating and helping the kingdom of God to grow.

Today's readings encourage us never to give up but continue to sow the seeds of God's Kingdom around us by our love and service to the needy. Leave the growth or the results to God. Continue to pray Our Father every day and say, "Your Kingdom come".