

## Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time: The Christian Farmer's Almanac

The parable of the mustard seed. *“And Jesus said, behold the mustard seed. It is the smallest of seeds yet it grows into a large bush.”*

I want to begin this article with something you are doing right now, but might be taking for granted: reading. We all can pick up a newspaper or a magazine or a novel or whatever and in a few moments be brought into a world beyond our immediate surroundings. We can learn new things; we can develop our own intelligence; we can agree or disagree with someone we have never met and never will meet; we can be transported to the world of imagination, etc all due to our ability to read.

Now how did this start? How did we learn how to read? We started, most of us, with blocks and individual letters. We learned what sounds these letters represented. Then we put the letters together and learned how to spell words. We even learned new words. We put the words together and learned new concepts or reinforced that which we had learned. In very small steps we went from the letters on the blocks to being able to read the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas.

It all began in a small way. It all began with letters. The Kingdom of God is like a child learning his or her letters. Time goes on and Mom and Dad and teachers work with the child, and the child's ability to read grows so great that the child becomes a professor of English Literature. And so it is with the Kingdom of God. Great-Grandma and Great-Grandpa taught their children their prayers. They brought their children to Church and taught them with their lives to value their relationship with the Lord. And their children became parents and did the same. And their children are the Moms and Dads of our parish. The Church is full of good Christian men and woman, people of all walks of life, even priests, all living the values of the Kingdom of God, the spiritual realities of life.

And now you are doing the same. You are teaching the ABC's of religion to your children. You have faith that the Kingdom of God will spread through them. So, don't wonder if anything is getting through to the children. Don't allow yourself to think that maybe nothing is happening for your children. Trust in God. If a child who learns his letters can become a professor of English Literature, a child who learns the simplest lessons of faith can become a great force of love for the Kingdom of God. Say prayers with your children. Allow God to turn the tiny mustard seed into a great plant.

The parable of the weeds and the wheat. *And Jesus said, “The Kingdom of Heaven is like the farmer who sowed wheat, then an enemy came and sowed weeds...”* The weeds and the wheat grew together. “Let us get rid of the weeds,” said his workers when the weeds and the wheat were still tiny plants. “Better not,” said the farmer, “you might lose some of the wheat too. We'll wait until they are ready for harvesting when we're sure we know what is weed and what is wheat. Then we'll get rid of the weeds.”

The Kingdom of Heaven is like the School where we send our treasures, our

children. They are not finished products when they get there. They have to do a lot of growing. They are still our treasures, and we love them. Perhaps in the school there are other children who may not have experienced basic human values. Perhaps, they have been raised in violent households, or households torn apart by some form of chemical dependency. Perhaps, they have witnessed people hurting others, taking what is not theirs, using bad language, doing terrible things. As a result, these children may have some pretty rough edges. Should the principal of the school throw the children from dysfunctional homes out before they cause serious problems, or should he give them the opportunity to learn basic values from the school and even from their classmates? Yes, children need to be removed from the mainstream if they do something that threatens the welfare of the other children, but they are not going to be removed if they have not offended gravely, because the plants are still young and there may be wheat where we think there is weed.

The Kingdom of Heaven is like the life of every man and every woman. There is *that* in each of us which is wheat. There is *that* which is weed. Should God destroy us because of the weed in us? Or should he give us time? Perhaps that which is weed in us can be overtaken by that which is wheat. A strong prayer life goes a long way in preventing serious sin. The Divine Farmer isn't ready to give up on the crop. We shouldn't give up on ourselves. God knows that what may appear to be weed is in reality wheat. For example, a man has a drinking problem. His drinking is destroying himself and his family. Through prayer and the determination to change his life and through his own openness to the grace of God, he goes for help. He first becomes a member of AA. Then he is active in helping others. Now for the last fifteen years he is dry. He is still an alcoholic, but his condition has resulted in virtue overcoming vice. Now he helps others. God didn't give up on him. He didn't give up on himself. What looked like weed, the sickness of alcoholism, turned out to be wheat as he brings God's healing to other alcoholics.

The parable of the mustard seed: the little efforts we make for the Kingdom of God have a tremendous impact upon the world. The parable of the weeds and wheat: God has infinite patience. He is not about to give up on his people. We should not give up on others. And we should not give up on ourselves.

The parable of the mustard seed and the parable of the weeds and the wheat. Two simple parables. Two simple stories. Two tremendous sources of encouragement for us.

Amazing Grace.