

FR. PETER'S HOMILY  
11TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME  
FATHER'S DAY

Again, a very happy and blessed Father's Day to all the dads present. One of my fond memories of my Dad is his planting a garden. He planted one every year up until the summer two years before he died at the age of 86. When I was young, I wondered why he invested so much time and energy growing vegetables when you could just go to the supermarket and buy them. As I got older I began to realize the values that could be learned by getting your hands dirty, planting seeds, and watching them grow. It takes a lot of patience and trust to tend a garden. Like the man in the first parable in today's Gospel, you have to marvel at the mystery of how plants grow. And we marvel at God's amazing design of entrusting the garden of the earth to our first parents and their descendants. Just as God wants us to be co-creators with him in caring for the earth, so too does God want us to be partners in the Divine plan of salvation which Jesus refers to as "the Kingdom of God." But we must always remember that it is God who causes growth to occur.

This is what the prophet Ezekiel is talking about as he speaks to the people of Israel who were in exile and thought that God had abandoned them. God will take a tender shoot from the cedar of the house of David and plant it upon Mt. Zion, and it will grow into a majestic cedar in which every kind of bird will dwell. Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment of God's promise. However, Jesus was not sent to establish an earthly kingdom, but to plant the Kingdom of God in the hearts of all who would come to believe. Jesus replaces the symbol of the majestic cedar with the image of the mustard seed. This tiniest of seeds produces a plant that can grow up to eight feet tall - I googled it! It is large enough and strong enough to accommodate the nests of all different kinds of birds. It also spreads quickly and is very resilient. If you let it go, it can take over a garden in no time. If you try to destroy it, it will sprout up again. The mustard seed will flourish wherever it is planted. Jesus tells us that this is what the Kingdom of God is like: It has small beginnings, is fast growing, will recover from attempts to destroy it, spreads everywhere, and has room enough in its branches for everyone. The fact that the Kingdom has room in its branches for everyone has been highlighted by Pope Francis. He said: "Let us not forget that the Eucharist is meant to nourish those who are weary and hungry along the way. A Church of the pure and perfect is a room with no place for anyone. On the other hand, a Church with open doors, that gathers and celebrates around Christ, is a large room where everyone--everyone, the righteous and sinners--can enter."

Just as we trust in the mysterious workings of God's design that causes the seed to germinate and grow, we are challenged to trust in the working of God's grace - often unseen - which moves hearts and causes faith to increase.

St. Paul, in today's second reading, reminds us that we walk by faith, not by sight. We might not always see the results of our participation in growing the Kingdom of God, but we keep on working, always "aspiring to please the Lord."