

Our knowledge of seeds varies greatly, depending on whether we are a farmer or a home gardener. Even if we do not have daily contact with seeds, nearly all of us are aware, to some degree, of the essential role that seeds play in our very existence.

Without seeds there would be no vegetables, grains, grasses, or trees, to name a few of the life forms that come from seeds. We rely on seeds for our very existence. Without seeds, life as we know it would cease to exist. Because of its essential role in life itself, the seed has become a wonderful metaphor for many of the important aspects of our lives.

Today's Gospel reading uses the metaphor of the seed to help us understand the nature of the Kingdom of God. Jesus gives two parables to illustrate the Kingdom of God. The first is a parable about seeds that a man scatters on the land. As he goes about his life, the seeds germinate, sprout and grow, but he has no idea how this happens. With only some water, warm sunshine, trust and a little patience, the marvelous growth takes place and develops into a full-grown crop. How that can happen we do not know. It is a mystery.

This is the way it is with the Kingdom of God. God's Word is spread throughout the world. The Word of God germinates, sprouts and grows in people's hearts. The Kingdom of God grows mysteriously. We do not know how this happens because this is God's grace at work in their lives.

The second parable is that of the tiny mustard seed that grows many times its size. It grows so big, in fact, that birds can find shelter and shade in its branches. The Catholic Church began with a small group of Apostles in Jerusalem. From there it spread north to Antioch in Syria, and then across the Mediterranean to Rome, throughout Europe, and eventually to the whole world. How all this happened is even more of a mystery than the growth of a mustard seed into the largest of shrubs. And this is how God's Kingdom on earth continues to be built up.

We may wonder if this is the way the Kingdom works, does it mean that we do not have to do anything? Can we not simply sit back and let God's Kingdom grow up around us for our personal benefit? *No*, that is not the lesson Jesus is teaching us.

Think of these parables not so much as descriptions of the Kingdom that is around us but as descriptions of the Kingdom that is *within us*.

The two parables of the seeds that we heard today are concerned with growth, not physical growth, *but spiritual growth*. Our faith in Jesus sprouts from the tiniest seeds of faith planted upon our hearts. How large it grows depends on us. We are given the gift of faith, but it is always our choice whether or not to accept and act on the gift we have been given. Will we water? Will we weed?

The seed of God's Word is first planted in our hearts at Baptism. Because most of us were baptized as infants, parents have a vital role in helping the seed of God's Word grow in their children. They give life giving water to the seed by the example they set by daily prayer, going to Sunday Mass, living a good Catholic life in the home, in the community and in their workplace, will go a long way in determining their children's spiritual growth and their attitude to life and to God. As they mature, their task is to tenderly care and nurture the seeds of Baptism planted in them so it can grow and work powerfully within them.

Through the work of the Holy Spirit, growth comes from within us. Like the farmer, we can nurture this growth by removing the thorns and thistles of sin in our lives. We can make the decision to avoid the things that hamper God's work in us: certain books and television programs, gossiping about others, viewing pornography on computers, festering resentments, concern only for ourselves and our interests, indifference to the poor and suffering.

If we want to see the Kingdom of God grow within us, we can nourish the seed of our faith through reading God's Word in the Scriptures, by prayer, by receiving the Holy Eucharist, by faithfully attending Mass on Sunday or by participating in the Mass on TV on-line and by loving our neighbour. Gradually, with sufficient time, we will see this seed spring to life, perhaps without really knowing when it happened.

Many of us have the uneasy feeling that after years of struggling with our Catholic life, we are no nearer to God. There appears to be no spiritual growth of the Kingdom of God inside of us. There is no mastering of our personal shortcomings. The same old sins keep recurring and preventing our progress on the roadway to perfection.

The two parables teach us not to be discouraged, but to continue striving to develop and grow. How easily we forget that God rewards our efforts, as well as our ability to keep trying and not to give up. We may fail to realize that His grace can work through our human weakness and limitations and can accomplish what is beyond our dreams.

We are not going to be able to measure our growth, but we can be certain that it will happen as we tend the seed of the Word of God that has been planted in our hearts by our prayers and the Sacraments.

One day Christ will be revealed, and His kingdom will come in all its glory. All that is wrong will be made right, and all wickedness and evil will be judged. Every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

And on that day, we will marvel at how God's kingdom has grown. From Christ's humble beginnings in Bethlehem, to His death on the Cross, to His exaltation in heaven, to His glorious return, like a seed growing to harvest, God's kingdom will fill the whole earth. And together we will praise our great God and King forever and ever.

Life is always going to be full of choices. Let us strive to make choices that lead us closer to God and one another, and not farther away. When the harvest times comes and the sickle swings, we want to be gathered up into God's storage barns, that is, into His Kingdom.