

11<sup>th</sup> Sunday per Annum - B  
Ezekiel 17:22-24;  
II Corinthians 5:6-10;  
Mark 4:26-34  
Little Flower - 6/13/21

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today's reading from Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians offers three insights. The first insight is very practical. In today's reading, he told the Corinthians that he had mixed feelings about living or dying. If he stayed alive in this world to continue ministering, he would be away from the Lord and would continue to suffer. On the other hand, if he died, he would be with the Lord, but he would no longer be able to minister to others.

Mixed feelings are part of everyone's life. For example, older people often have very mixed feelings about living and dying. Older people often say they are ready to die, but they also want to stay alive for their families. This is why dying people often need to be given permission to die by their families. Likewise, when we lose loved ones, we generally have mixed feelings of sadness and joy, sadness for ourselves because of our loss but joy for them who are no longer suffering and are with God. Unfortunately, when people have mixed feelings about a loved one who dies, they often feel guilty although both feelings are equally valid. Choices we make often leave us with mixed feelings. No choice we make is completely good or completely bad. In fact, we cannot choose something bad unless we find some good, real or imagined, in it.

Paul also wrote that we walk by faith and not by sight. Because we live in a scientific and technological world, many people struggle to believe in anyone they cannot see, hear, or feel. However, the New Testament makes it abundantly clear that if we have to see to believe, it is not really faith. In fact, we believe that the reward of faith is sight or vision. Jesus makes this most clear when he appeared to Thomas and the apostles the Sunday after Easter. When Thomas professed faith in Jesus, Jesus said to him, "*Have you come to believe because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed*" [Jn. 20:29].

At the end of the reading, Paul wrote that "*we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive recompense, according to what he did in the body, whether good or evil.*" Christians often have very different understandings of God. For example, some Christians stress God's justice almost to the exclusion of God's mercy. Others stress God's mercy almost to the exclusion of God's justice. The truth is God is both merciful and just. Today's reading reminds us that we are accountable to God for the choices we make, for how we live our lives. At the same time, we can never forget that mercy is the quality most proper to God so much so that we can say that God's mercy is God's justice.

The first parable in today's Gospel also speaks to our lives. Although it addressed the growth of the kingdom of God, I think it also addresses our personal growth in Christ. This parable suggests that even when we do not feel or experience the presence, power, and activity of God in our lives, God is still working within us through his Spirit living within us to help us grow into the-best-version-of-ourselves.

My brothers and sisters, today's Gospel also contains the parable of the mustard seed. A mustard seed is very tiny. Since the beginning, Christianity has continued to spread throughout the world. This spread continues today. However, today in our part of the world fewer people identify, or at least identify strongly, with Christianity or Catholicism whereas in some parts of the world Christianity is growing almost exponentially. If we want to continue to proclaim the Good News of Jesus with others in our world, it is important that we walk by faith and that we live lives in conformity with the Gospel in which we say we believe.