

[Readings: Ezekiel 17:22-24; Psalm 90; 2 Cor. 5:6-10; Mark 4:26-34]

Has it ever happened to you that you send a letter or an email or a text, expecting a reply? And when that reply doesn't happen soon enough for you, you send a second letter, or email or text, and in the meantime a reply DOES appear from your pen-pal? That's what happened with this weekend's bulletin.

The bulletin copy is sent to the publisher ten days before we get the finished product delivered a couple of days before the weekend. But a lot can happen in ten days. For example, the staff met to discuss the proposed changes to our COVID-19 protocols. So what you read in my column this week is obsolete. Here is the latest "skinny" – like I know what it's like to be skinny...

Beginning next weekend, June 19th-- 20th:

Our church will have sections for open seating and safe-distance seating, whether you are vaccinated or not vaccinated.

Wearing masks or not wearing masks during Mass will be your choice, regardless of whether you are vaccinated or not vaccinated.

The upper baptismal font will be filled with fresh and circulating water. The lower font and the small holy water stoops at the church entrances will continue to remain empty. Please sanitize your hands before and after Mass.

Eucharistic Ministers will continue to wear masks during the distribution of Holy Communion, and will sanitize their hands before and after.

We ask that you continue to receive Holy Communion in your hands. Those wishing to receive on the tongue, please extend your tongue far enough to avoid the Eucharistic Minister's fingers coming into contact with your tongue.

After July 1, our parish office will be open on Mondays from 10 AM to 2 PM and on Fridays from 9 AM to 12 Noon. The office also will be open on the first and third Saturday of the month from 9 AM to 12 Noon.

Most importantly, we are hoping to resume all parish activities come September. Praise God!

Finally, another "Gentle Reminder" to keep your feet off the kneelers and to raise and lower them slowly and quietly with your hand. They are delicate.

Also please use your hand, not your cane or walker to gently press the handicap plate to open the church doors. Banging on the door plate short-circuits the plate and it won't work. I thank you, the kneelers thank you and the door plates thank you. Now on to the homily...

The readings this week show that what is small, hard to see, and even invisible can have vast importance. Whether it's the tender shoot of the cedar tree or the tiny seed of the mustard plant, what seems slight now will become something mighty.

"We walk by faith, not by sight," the Second Letter to the Corinthians says; we hope in that which is unseen, and in the future will come to pass. The important thing, though, is to realize how the present still matters. How you tend that invisible seed makes a difference; what you do "at home in the body" now has consequences for when you are at home in the Lord, so "aspire to please him" at all times.

Think of the little seeds, shoots, and easy-to-miss places in your life where more attention and cultivation "shall bear fruit," as the psalmist says, in the kingdom of God. What we say and what we do are like seeds planted in the hearts and minds and spirits of our children. Jesus makes it very clear that often times it's the smallest things which make the biggest difference in our faith. The same can be said about parenting. They say imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. Your children will not only imitate you, but in many ways, they will grow up to be like you simply because you're their parents.

I cannot tell you how many times growing up as a kid and a teen, my mom would look at me with love and say, "You're just like your FATHER!" Or my dad looking at me the same way and saying, "Don't look at me with your mother's eyes! You look just like your MOTHER!"

Unknowingly, we can teach the next generation of believers wrongly. There seems to be two schools of learning, when actually there is a third way.

Here are the two main ways to get religion wrong. One is to presume it has nothing to do with the material world. So forget political and social realities, pray harder, and concentrate on the spiritual life because it's the only forum that

counts. The other mistake is to assume that if religion has nothing to do with the material world, then it has nothing to offer because that's where people find themselves. So eat, drink, and be merry, get what you can, and never mind about God until the unlikely event when heavenly possibilities intrude on practical, earthly realities.

Jesus issues an invitation to a third way. It's the way of the farmer, who views the ground not only as dirt but as the seat of all hope. For the ground, coupled with his own purposeful activity, is the medium of a harvest through God's holy desire to bring forth life. The seed sleeps in the dark soil, dying to its original being to emerge as something greater than itself. This world is the soil of our lives. It's where potential meets possibility and possibility the movement toward perfection.

The mystic writer Thomas Merton described grace as the hidden potential we have for every virtue -- like the oak tree hidden in the meat of an acorn. "To be an acorn," he wrote, "is to have a taste for being an oak tree." You and I seek grace, desire its transformative effect, because we're acorns with oak trees inside with a taste for who we're meant to be.

Planted in the soil of this world, with proper care and attention, the virtues in our spiritual genes will emerge and we'll assume our place in the grove of those giants, the saints. It's not only simple to do, it's the plan. God's plan, anyway. The only thing that interferes with its maturity is if we plan something else. Saint Paul says mortal life keeps us away from the fullness of life with God. But he doesn't advocate throwing our lives away. He urges we invest them, with courage, walking by faith. We walk by faith and not by sight. Let us please our Heavenly Father whether we are at home or away, so that we may receive our recompense for our good example and not our bad. AMEN!