

Jesus often used illustrations to capture the imaginations of people and lead them into a deeper insight into what he wanted to tell them. He began his public ministry by proclaiming the Kingdom of God as a near and present reality. The Kingdom of God had to do with God reigning in the hearts of believers. Its beginning is like the sowing of a small seed. Jesus says that it is “as if a man would scatter seed on the ground ...., and the seed would sprout and grow, without his knowing how.” The Kingdom of God is a mysterious reality; its growth is not always perceptible; it has a hidden quality to it.

The years of Jesus’ life prior to his public ministry are often referred to as the hidden years. The Biblical record is scanty. We know so little about those early years. Jesus’ public ministry had a kind of hidden quality to it. Father Nouwen writes that “even his public years were invisible as far as most people were concerned. Whereas the way of the world is to insist on publicity, celebrity, popularity and getting maximum exposure, God prefers to work in secret.... In God's sight, the things that really matter seldom take place in public.... ” [Henri Nouwen, *Letters to Marc about Jesus*, Harper, San Francisco, 1988, p. 68].

Few people, even his own disciples, had any real sense of what Jesus was all about. Jesus saw himself as a sower scattering the little seeds out of which God would bring forth something far greater and more wonderful than anyone would have dreamed. He continued to trust that his Father was at work in him, even when others failed to perceive it.

Many of God’s saints lived a kind of hidden life and were largely unknown during their own lifetime. St Therese of Lisieux entered the Carmelite Order. She felt a deep desire to join the great missionaries and work in distant mission fields. But her health would not permit it. Shortly after she joined the Carmelites she fell ill and was restricted to her bed until she died at the age of 24 years. She lived the life of a cloistered nun. Much of her life was hidden from the world. She may well have wondered what God’s purpose was for her. She accepted that she would never be able to do the great things for God that she wished to do. But she learned a great secret. Through prayer and reflection she learned that she could do little things with great love. She learned that it is not the thing itself but the love with which it is done that makes it great. If she allowed Jesus to love in her she could love others with the very

same love that Jesus loves each of us. Her secret came to be known as “The Little Way.”

God is always at work in our lives. It may be hidden from us; we may not know how until later on; so much is mystery; but, nevertheless, it is real. The Apostle Paul tells that “the life we now live is hidden in Christ... What we are to be has not yet been revealed to us.”

Seeds planted in the soil remain hidden for some time before we see any evidence that something is happening. One of the world's strangest little seeds is the seed of the Chinese bamboo tree. It will lie in the soil for five years before the first little sprout becomes visible above ground. For five years it lies hidden. And then suddenly, in just six weeks, it grows up to an extraordinary height of 90 feet. Experts tell us that during its first five years in the soil the bamboo seed is building an elaborate root system. That root system is the foundation that enables it to grow 90 feet in six weeks.

Growing deep spiritual roots takes time. Sometimes it may take so long that we may wonder if we are making any spiritual progress at all. It seems that the same faults, the same temptations and the same sins, plague us day in and day out. People tell me that in the confessional. “Father, it is always the same sins.” I say, “Well, at least you are not committing new sins.”

It is important not to lose heart. If we don't see anything happening, it does not mean that nothing is happening. We must not give up. We need to nurture the seed of the Kingdom. We need to keep on praying. We need to keep on trying to overcome our selfishness. We need to keep on striving to live as Jesus taught us.

God wants the seed of his kingdom to grow deep roots within us. We need to trust God. God knows what is happening in our hearts, even if we can't see it. We need to be patient. If we cultivate the field of our spiritual life, God will give the growth. This is very consoling.

We can join Jesus in sowing the seeds of the Kingdom. With Jesus we can sow seeds of kindness, love, justice and peace. We can do small works of mercy giving our time and energy out of love to help others. “Do not be afraid to do small things at the prompting of the Holy Spirit..... Take the smallest step” [Bishop Robert Barron]. Don't worry if no one notices. God likes to work in secret anyway. God is the master of special operations. If you work with him, he will make it all bear fruit.

Today, we have the happiness of celebrating Eucharist together with some of our little children who are making their First Holy Communion. Today Jesus comes to us. Today we become one with Jesus. With Jesus, living in us we can love one another just like he loves us. We can be gentle like Jesus. We can be merciful and non-judgmental like Jesus. We can be compassionate and kind like Jesus. If we unite ourselves to Jesus we can be sowers of the seeds of new hope and the Kingdom will become an ever more visible reality.

Dear friends, let us never despise small seeds or little steps. Let us never lose heart when we cannot yet see what we are hoping for. And let us never discount the power of the Eucharist to sustain and give us life and hope.

Fr. Neil