

11TH SUNDAY - ORD. (B)
DO I ASPIRE TO PLEASE GOD ALWAYS?

Everything is in the hands of the Lord, because everything begins with Him and ends with Him. His ways are different from ours, but it is possible to understand Him and live according to His ways. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts and your ways are not my ways, says the Lord. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are my ways above your ways and my thoughts above your thoughts" (Isa.55:8-9).

The first reading and the gospel tell us how mysterious, and how insignificant the kingdom of heaven seems to be. Due to the hidden aspect of its importance, many people may overlook its importance and ignore it. What we normally consider important may not be so in the eyes of God. If God can take a lofty shoot to plant it on a high mountain, then indeed His ways are not our ways. This was to teach the Israelites that He would take them from exile, from Babylon, and put them back in Jerusalem.

The trees mentioned in both readings were a representation of the cross of Christ which became a tree of life for the salvation of all. The cross is a sign of contradiction, as the prophecy of Ezekiel and the parable of the mustard seed indicate. Like the seed sown which grows without being noticed, so it is important to live our lives in faith, because that is how the kingdom of God develops within us. When the word is sown within us it is not showy but it grows and bears fruit. That is why St. Paul talks about walking by faith and not by sight. "Only faith can guarantee the blessings that we hope for, or prove the existence of realities that are unseen. It is for their faith that our ancestors are acknowledged" (Heb.11:1-2). As we heard last week, what is seen is transitory or temporal but what is unseen is eternal, so we are reminded that we are strangers here passing through this world.

The parable of the mustard seed tells us how important the kingdom of God is, and how it brings comfort to all who embrace it. The kingdom surpasses everything, but the unfortunate thing is that it is difficult for many people to recognize it. Because of that many of us do not yearn to earn it, as St. Paul was eager to experience it. We do not want to carry the tree of life - the cross.

If I am aware that I am passing through this life, and will stand before the judgement seat one day, then I have to seek the mind of God and understand His ways. I have to aspire to please Him always; but is that part of my daily plans or schedule? Do I factor into what I say and do the idea of knowing God's ways and doing His will?

Today we are reminded that whatever we are doing in this body is a way of preparing ourselves to stand before the Lord one day. We pray always that Christ "will come again to judge the living and the dead"; do I count myself among those to be judged? Sometimes it seems as if those to be judged are somewhere else and not those of us saying it. If we are not conscious of it, then today when we are praying we should remember that we are the ones going to stand before the judgment seat one day; that day you do not know and I do not know.

The consoling part of the readings, especially the first reading and the gospel, is that, if I have faith in God, He can work within me and turn things around so that my life will please Him. He can change my life like He did for Paul, Augustine, Mary Magdalene, and many others. The expression of my faith in God should be seen in my actions and not just in words. "How does it help my brothers, when someone who has never done a single good act claims to have faith? Will that faith bring salvation? Faith without good deeds is dead" (Jm.2:14-17).

"Do not store up treasures for yourselves on earth, where moth and woodworm destroy them and thieves can break in and steal. But store up treasures for yourselves in heaven, where neither moth nor woodworm destroys them and thieves cannot break in and steal. For wherever your treasure is, there will your heart be too" (Mt.6:19-21). The big tree from the smallest mustard seed becomes the shelter for birds of all kinds. This is the kingdom we are to aspire to take shelter in one day, Jews and Gentiles alike. Am I aspiring to please God and not human beings? We need courage to be able to embrace the cross of Christ planted on Calvary which has brought us salvation.