

Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year B  
Fr. Chad S. Green  
Mary, Queen of Peace Church  
Sammamish, Washington  
13 June 2021

Ezekiel 17:22-24  
Psalm 92  
2 Corinthians 5:6-10  
("The seed is the word of God...") Mark 4:26-34

*We Can Help or Hinder the Growth of the Kingdom of God*

When I arrived on my first day as a priest at Holy Family Parish four years ago, I found in my office two plants that weren't doing too well. They had been abandoned there, and the office staff were planning on throwing them out. But I said that it'd be OK to leave them there. That I would take care of them and see if I could get them back to health. Over the next couple months or so, with some water, sun, attention, and love, they *did* start to show signs of new growth again!

In fact, one of the plants was an orchid, and it was particularly exciting when one day I noticed that a new flower bloom was growing out of what had otherwise been a barren plant. Seeing these plants come back to life and begin to thrive was both rewarding and inspiring for me.

Over that first year, I started to acquire more plants in my office. Some were rescues, some were gifts, and some were ones I picked up on my own. Then I started getting plants for my room in the rectory. Four years later, I now have over twenty plants between my office and the rectory. And, taking care of plants has become a hobby for me. I enjoy watching them grow, plucking away dead leaves, and getting excited when a new branch or bloom bursts forth.

I've learned some things about them through these experiences, but I still have a lot more to learn. For one, I don't even know the names of most of my plants. And, the care I give them—how much water, how much sunlight—is mostly based on my guesses and seeing what works and what doesn't. This has led to some disappointing casualties along the way. Who knew that a plant could have *too much* water? Or *too much* sun?

However, no matter how much we as humans can and do learn about plants, the deepest mystery of plants remains beyond our knowledge.<sup>1</sup> The deepest mystery of the source of the life and the growth plants—and that of all creation—is God’s work. It’s God’s work, but He invites us to be a part of it.<sup>2</sup> To observe it and to learn from it. Even more, God invites us to cooperate with it, to cultivate and care for life.<sup>3</sup> Even though we are not the source of life in our world—we *are* a part of whether life is *hindered* or *helped* in our world.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus teaches us that “this is how it is with the kingdom of God.”<sup>4</sup> We are not the source of the kingdom of God in our world. But, we have an important and holy role in scattering seeds of faith, cultivating and caring for them, and watching them sprout and grow. Our thoughts, words, and actions *do* have an impact on the growth of the kingdom of God. What we do either *helps* or *hinders* the growth of the kingdom of God in our own hearts and in our world.

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On Pentecost Sunday, Archbishop Etienne introduced a new Pastoral Plan for our Archdiocese called *Knowing Jesus Christ, Embracing His Mission*.<sup>5</sup> Archbishop said that the plan “is really quite simple. It’s to carry out the mission of Jesus Christ.”<sup>6</sup> The plan is the fruit of almost a hundred listening sessions throughout the Archdiocese over the past year, as well as prayer, discernment, and discussion led by the Archdiocese Pastoral Council.<sup>7</sup>

Archbishop has asked each one of us to read the plan. The good news is that it is very readable—in that it’s fairly brief. You can find it on the Archdiocese website, or a link to it from our parish website. It’s intentional that the plan is brief, because it’s meant to be something that can be read and re-read on a regular basis. Also, it’s meant to leave space for the plan to take root, unfold, and grow throughout the Archdiocese as a whole, as well as to leave room for it to

be planted and cultivated in the ways that are best suited for growing the kingdom of God in each person and in each parish of the Archdiocese.

The plan is comprised of a mission statement, a vision statement, three focus areas, and four values. As Archbishop said, the mission statement is simply the Great Commission given to us by Jesus at the conclusion of the Gospel of Matthew:

“Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”<sup>8</sup>

In other words, we have been commissioned by Jesus to go out into the world, spreading seeds of faith in all the places that we go: our home, neighborhood, workplace, school, here at the parish, etc.

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The purpose of the plan is not to “start over” in every parish. Rather, it’s meant to help us do three things—both as a parish and as individual disciples of Jesus Christ:

- **Identify the fruits** that the parish and our personal lives as disciples are bearing, so that they can be kept and strengthened.
- **Identify what needs to be pruned** in the parish and in our personal lives, which will help the fruits to be strengthened.
- **Identify what new seeds need to be planted** in the parish and in our personal lives, so that new life that God is calling for will come forth.

The adoption of the pastoral plan at this particular time is providential, in that we are coming out of the pandemic, and starting to see a fuller return of parish ministries that have been limited in many ways during the past year.

This is an exciting time and opportunity, but, like tending to plants, it takes a lot of work: cultivating, watching, being attentive, looking for signs of what’s helping growth and what’s hindering growth. It can be exciting when we see sprouts and new growth, but it also takes patience and faith.

In particular, I think pruning takes a lot of faith. Pruning is my least favorite thing about taking care of my plants. I've been told that it's necessary, but I rarely—if ever—do it. When I see all the growth that my plants have experienced over the year, I just can't imagine cutting off their branches. If it still has leaves on it, why cut it off? It seems unfair to the branch and it seems like that would be going backwards—even wasting all the energy, time, and effort that went into that growth.

One time, a parishioner saw a plant in my office that was very full of branches and beautiful leaves. However, as an experienced plant person, she said to me, “Father Chad, that plant is looking like a ‘hippie’. Can I take it home, prune it, and bring it back to you?” I said, “Sure!” But, when she brought it back to me, I was shocked! I said to her, “What did you do to my plant?!” All the beautiful branches and leaves were cut back and it looked like stubs of branches.

But, guess what happened? It grew back! Healthier and better than ever! So, I've seen what pruning does for the life and health of my plants. You'd think that would make me a believer in pruning. Yet, I still can't get myself to do it. So, I know that pruning can be hard to do—it takes faith to believe that those branches and leaves will grow back again.

Another thing that can be hard is planting new seeds. When we plant a tiny seed, it takes faith to have patience for the seed to become a sprout, and for a sprout to become a fully-grown beautiful plant.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, it can seem daunting to start a new ministry. To be OK with it being small for a while. To have vision and hope for what it might one day become. To have patience and humility to allow it to grow into what the Lord wants it to be.

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So, what are we being called to do right now? As I said, Archbishop has asked us all to start by reading the plan. And then, to bring it to our personal prayer. To do some personal assessing of our own relationship with the Lord. How well do we know Jesus Christ; how are we doing at embracing His mission. What fruits are we seeing in our own lives as disciples? What parts of our faith lives need to be pruned? What parts of our faith lives need new seeds to be planted?

Then, once we've started by tending to our personal faith lives, to be open to and prepared for doing the same assessments of our ministries here at Mary, Queen of Peace. There will be more to come later this summer and fall, as we work together and utilize the Archdiocese Pastoral Plan to do this assessment of the ministries in our parish.

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The growth of the kingdom of God in our personal lives, in our parish, and in our world—well, that's God's work. It's done by His grace, His power, and in His time. With faith, hope, love, and humility, we leave the fruits of the harvest up to Him.

However, God is inviting us to participate in this holy work. He's inviting us to plant seeds, to prune, to be attentive to what the kingdom of God needs to thrive in our hearts and in our world. He's inviting us to recognize that, yes, the kingdom of God grows in our world through His power—but we *do* play an important part. Our thoughts, words, actions, and prayers can do one of two things: they can either *hinder* or they can *help* the kingdom of God grow in our world.

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<sup>1</sup> Mark 4:27

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 1:26ff

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 2:15

<sup>4</sup> Mark 4:26

<sup>5</sup> <https://archseattle.org/pastoral-plan/>

<sup>6</sup> Archbishop Paul Etienne, from his video: *Pastoral Plan: Knowing Jesus, Embracing His Mission* (20 May 2021)

<sup>7</sup> <https://archseattle.org/about-the-archdiocese-of-seattle/archbishop-etienne/pastoralplanning/>

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<https://nwcatholic.org/news/northwest-catholic/lay-catholics-named-to-new-archdiocesan-pastoral-council>

<sup>8</sup> Matthew 28:19-20

<sup>9</sup> Mark 4:31-32