

11th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year: B

Ez 17.22-24; II Cor 5.6-10 Mk 4.26-34

How Can the Seed Grow?

A parish priest in a parish tells of a woman who called him to speak of her dissatisfaction with the program of the Church. He invited her to come to his office and talk the problem over with him. She accepted the invitation and brought to his attention some of the things that were needed and could be done.

He gratefully acknowledged the wisdom of her ideas. He then said, "This is wonderful that you are so concerned and interested in this. You are the very person this Church needs to head up this program. Will you take the job?"

Her reply was just as immediate. "Oh, no, I don't want to get involved. With my club work and the hours that I put on some other things, I just don't have the time. But I will be glad to advise you any time."

The preacher's answer was classic and well put: "Good, gracious, lady, that's the problem now. I already have 400 advisers. I need someone who will work."

The Grand Design

When and how did the universe begin? Why are we here? Why is there something rather than nothing? What is the nature of reality? Why are the laws of nature so finely tuned as to allow for the existence of beings like ourselves? And, finally, is the apparent "grand design" of our universe evidence of a benevolent creator who set things in motion—or does science offer another explanation?

The most fundamental questions about the origins of the universe and of life itself, once the province of philosophy, now occupy the territory where scientists, philosophers, and theologians meet—if only to disagree. In their new book, **Stephen Hawking** and **Leonard Mlodinow** present the most recent scientific thinking about the mysteries of the universe, in nontechnical language marked by both brilliance and simplicity.

In ***The Grand Design*** they explain that according to quantum theory, the cosmos does not have just a single existence or history, but rather that every possible history of the universe exists simultaneously. When applied to the universe as a whole, this idea calls into question the very notion of cause and effect. But the “top-down” approach to cosmology that Hawking and

Mlodinow describe would say that the fact that the past takes no definite form means that we create history by observing it, rather than that history creates us. The authors further explain that we ourselves are the product of quantum fluctuations in the very early universe, and show how quantum theory predicts the “multiverse”—the idea that ours is just one of many universes that appeared spontaneously out of nothing, each with different laws of nature.

Along the way Hawking and Mlodinow question the conventional concept of reality, posing a “model-dependent” theory of reality as the best we can hope to find. And they conclude with a riveting assessment of M-theory, an explanation of the laws governing us and our universe that is currently the only viable candidate for a complete “theory of everything.” If confirmed, they write, it will be the unified theory that Einstein was looking for, and the ultimate triumph of human reason.

A succinct, startling, and lavishly illustrated guide to discoveries that are altering our understanding and threatening some of our most cherished belief systems, ***The Grand Design*** is a book that will inform, misguide and perhaps even instill atheism in people of little faith.

Our Earthly Home

This earthly tent we occupy is not our home; our home is in heaven. We are just passing through this place. We are shown in other places (Acts 16.16-40; 22.22-29; Romans 13.1-7; 2 Thessalonians 3.6-13; Ephesians 4.28) that just because we are not with the Lord now, doesn't mean that we shouldn't concern ourselves with building up the earthly city.

We who in this world are away from the Lord, walk about on earth, it is true, but we are hastening on our way to heaven. For here we do not have a lasting place, but we are wayfarers and pilgrims, like all our fathers (Saint Jerome; after A.D. 392, *Short Commentaries On The Psalms*, 63).

We are Citizens to Two Cities

This council exhorts Christians, as citizens of two cities, to strive to discharge their earthly duties conscientiously and in response to the Gospel spirit. They are mistaken who, knowing that we have here no abiding city but seek one which is to come (Hebrews 13.14), think that they may therefore shirk their earthly responsibilities. For they are forgetting that by the faith itself they are more obliged than ever to measure up to these duties, each according to his proper vocation (2 Thes 3.6-13; Eph 4.28). The Christian who neglects his temporal duties, neglects his duties toward his neighbor and even God, and jeopardizes his eternal salvation. Christians should rather rejoice that, following the example of Christ Who worked as an artisan, they are free to give proper exercise to all their earthly activities and to their humane, domestic, professional, social and technical enterprises by gathering them into one vital synthesis with religious values, under whose supreme direction all things are harmonized unto God's glory (Vatican II; 7 December 1965; *Gaudium et spes*, 43).

The Mustard Seed

According to Mark's gospel, Jesus began teaching in parables shortly after appointing the twelve. A parable is a wise saying or short fictitious story used by Jesus to set forth His teaching. Parables may contain allegorical elements. Today we hear the parables of the growing seed and of the mustard seed.

He said, "This is how it is with the kingdom of God; it is as if a man were to scatter seed on the land and would sleep and rise night and day and the seed would sprout and grow, he knows not how. Of its own accord the land yields fruit, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. And when the grain is ripe, he wields the sickle at once, for the harvest has come."

Jesus tells his disciples about his Church: The preaching of the gospel; the generously scattered seed will unfailingly yield its fruit, independent of who sows or reaps. It is God who gives the growth (1 Cor 3.5-9).

He said, "To what shall we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable can we use for it?"

Grace Grows Silently

This also refers to the action of grace in each soul: God silently works a transformation in each one of us causing us to make resolutions which shape our soul. We resolve to be faithful, surrender ourselves, respond to grace. Our callings and responses may be different as we are individuals (Eph 4.11-13). Even though we must make the decision to become a follower of Christ, it is the Holy Spirit who, working within us, gives a supernatural tone to our thoughts, desires and actions.

The Smallest becomes the Biggest

It is like a mustard seed that, when it is sown in the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on the earth. But once it is sown, it springs up and becomes the largest of plants and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the sky can dwell in its shade."

Practical Conclusion

The main meaning of this parable has to do with the contrast between the great and the small. The seed of the Kingdom of God on earth is something very tiny to begin with (Lk 12.32; Acts 1.19); but it will grow to be a big tree. The seed is planted in Peter and the apostles, has set its roots in Rome, and has grown to be a big tree; one which encompasses the whole world; a great multitude which no man can number (Rev 7.9)