

**The Parables of the Growing Seed and the Mustard Seed  
(11<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B)**

**Ezekiel 17:22-24—The Parable of the Cedar Tree**

1. Cedar of Lebanon: used to build Royal Palace and Temple (cf. 2 Sam 5; 1 Kings 5-7)
  - a. Wealth: king's house is "paneled" with "cedar" (Jer 22:14)
  - b. Strength: the voice of the LORD "breaks the cedars of Lebanon" (Ps 29:5)
  - d. Height: "lofty and lifted up" (Isa 2:13; Pliny the Elder, up to 130 ft tall)

"Say to Pharaoh king of Egypt and to his multitude: "...Behold, I will liken you to a cedar in Lebanon, with fair branches and forest shade, and *of great height, its top among the clouds...* So it towered high above all the trees of the forest; *its boughs grew large and its branches long...* All the birds of the air made their nests in its boughs; under its branches all the beasts of the field brought forth their young; and under its shadow dwelt all great nations. It was beautiful in its greatness... *The cedars in the garden of God could not rival it, nor the fir trees equal its boughs... no tree in the garden of God was like it in beauty.* I made it beautiful in the mass of its branches, and all the trees of Eden envied it, that were in the garden of God. (Ezekiel 31:1-9)

2. Cosmic Mountain: the great mountain that fills the earth (cf. Dan 2:44-45)
3. Supernatural Tree: "bears fruit" and "birds and beast" dwell beneath it

**Psalm 92—Lord, it is Good to Give Thanks to You**

1. Palm Tree: the "righteous" flourishes like "the palm tree" (v. 12)
2. Temple Cedar: the righteous "grow" in "the house of the LORD" (v. 13)

**2 Corinthians 5:6-10—Momentary Affliction vs. Eternal Weight of Glory**

1. Faith: "we walk by faith, and not by sight" (5:7)

**Mark 4:26-34—The Parables of Growing Seed and the Mustard Seed**

1. Parable of the Growing Seed: Unique: only found in the Gospel of Mark
  - a. Title: ("Seed Growing Secretly," "Patient Farmer," "Earth Producing of Itself")
  - c. Sower: scatters Seed on the Grain
  - d. Growth: "he knows not how" (=Mystery)
  - d. Power of God: "the earth produces of itself"
2. Parable of the Mustard Seed:
  - a. OT Background: Empires (Dan 4:10-12; Ezek 31:1-16; Ezek 17:22-24)
  - b. Mustard Seed: "smallest of all the seeds" (1 millimeter in diameter; proverbial)
  - b. Mustard Tree: "greatest of all shrubs" or "vegetables" (*lachanon*) (ca. 10 ft tall)
  - c. Bird of the Air: the "birds" come to "make nests in its shade"

**Vatican II on the Mystery of the Kingdom and the Church**

## The Mass Readings Explained

Christ inaugurated the Kingdom of heaven on earth and revealed to us the mystery of that kingdom... *The Church*, or, in other words, *the kingdom of Christ now present in mystery, grows visibly through the power of God in the world.* (Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumeng Gentium* no. 3)

### Questions for Discussion and Reflection (11<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B)

1. What do think of Ezekiel’s allegories of the empires compared with trees? How is Egypt like a “Cedar of Lebanon” (Ezek 31)? How is Israel like a great tree (Ezek 17)?

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2. What is the meaning of the Parable of the Growing Seed? What title would you give it?

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3. Why does Jesus compare the Kingdom of God to a “mustard seed” and a “mustard tree”? Why not a “cedar of Lebanon)?

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### For Further Study

1. Klyne R. Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018). Although written from a Protestant perspective, this remains perhaps the most exhaustive and most helpful treatment of the parables of Jesus in print. Extremely helpful, although in-depth and academic in tone.