

Homily for the Eleventh Sunday of Ordinary Time – 6/17/2018

Did you ever hear the story of the Chinese Bamboo Tree? If we listen to this story it can teach us lessons on patience and faith. It can teach us lessons on perseverance and development. And most of all it can teach us about Jesus parable in today's gospel.....how the kingdom of God grows in this world.

Here is the true story of the Chinese Bamboo Tree. A farmer plants a seed for the tree. Now like any planted seed, growth of the Chinese Bamboo Tree requires nurturing, water, fertile soil, and sunshine. You can do all that, yet in its first year, the farmer sees no visible signs of activity.

In the second year the farmer continues to nurture, water, provide fertile soil and allows the plant to get sunshine.....but again no growth above the soil.

In the third year he does the same. Still no growth from the plant above the soil. And the fourth year still there is no growth. You might think patience is running thin and the farmer begins to wonder if all his caring and watering etc. will ever be rewarded.

And then finally in the fifth year.....watch out. Here comes a miracle. There is growth.....and I mean growth! This Chinese Bamboo Tree which did not grow above the soil for the first four years.....grows not one foot.....or ten feet....or twenty....forty or sixty feet.....but eighty feet..... in just six weeks.

Such an eighty foot high tree would make it taller than the bell tower on this Saint James church. You might ask am I serious? Look up Chinese Bamboo Tree.

But the farmer and those who know these plants will tell you that all along the little tree was growing underground. It was developing a root system....a strong root system to support its outward growth in the fifth year...and beyond. Had the tree not developed a strong unseen foundation it could not have sustained its life as it grew. What's my point?

The same principle of growth for The Chinese Bamboo Tree....is true for Jesus parable about how the kingdom of God grows on this earth. But what is this kingdom of God?

The kingdom of God is "God present and at work in the created order." It can be found in everyday experiences. It is not something we have to wait for until heaven. God's kingdom is at work whenever people bear one another's burdens, forgive one another, heal one another, and work for a peaceful community.

This kingdom may exist in individual hearts, in institutions, in nature, and in the cosmos as a whole. It is not just for the future, not to be identified only with heaven. It started with the first moment of creation, it has a past and a present and a future. It broke into the world most decisively in the life of Jesus Christ.

You might say "but every year I don't see the world getting any better." Had the Chinese Bamboo Tree farmer dug up his little seed every year to see if it was growing, he would have stunted the growth of the tree.

Can we be patient? Can we persevere? Even when we do not see any kingdom of God growing on the surface of the earth. Can we continue to trust in what Jesus says God is doing? Even when we do not see immediate results.

You know we can look at our world and at times wonder. It feels like the first four years after planting the Chinese Bamboo Tree. Choose your depressing story on the evening news.

But a wise man said: "Don't get your ultimate news from CBS or ABC or NBC. And don't get your ultimate news from CNN, or MSNBC or FOX news. Get your ultimate news from the gospel.

But what happens if we humans blow up this earth? Well as the saintly mystical Jesuit Teilhard De Chardin said "that might set the kingdom of God back a million years, but it is still going to happen."

Look Jesus would not have said what he did in today's gospel unless it had already happened, was happening and would continue to happen. So why not take this lesson to heart: whenever we doubt Jesus words about the coming kingdom of God...why not think about the Chinese Bamboo Tree?