

11th Sunday in Ordinary Time - 2021 B

I'm not a very good carpenter, but you may know I sometimes fiddle around with wood ... as I often say, my three specialties in the shop are noise, scraps, and sawdust. I inherited the interest from my dad, who was quite gifted with his hands and creativity. I suppose he learned from necessity growing up on the farm, where you just do what needs doing; but to me, there is something inspiring about taking a part of God's creation and fashioning something new, re-organizing the raw materials into shapes and forms that serve some useful purpose like clocks and tables and crosses. ***Each species of wood has its different character, and the beauty of the grain, otherwise hidden or ignored, is revealed when it is cut and machined. In that grain, we see a slice of the history of a living thing preserved.*** Woodgrain of course results from the twists and turns and seasons of life that each tree experienced, coming from a single seed and given time and space to grow to maturity. ***Something that lived and died is brought to a new existence*** – even if as a homily prop.

Both Ezekiel and Jesus speak today about planting and growth ... and by extension, the need for patience and time. In our culture of instant gratification and ever-faster downloads, patience is a challenge for many. ***The tree, the mustard seed, the acorn and the walnut, along with our own aches and pains that take their own time to heal, remind us that nature and nature's God have their own rhythms and seasons. No amount of human willing or human technology can overcome the need for time for growth to occur.*** And what is true for plants and trees is even more profoundly true for human growth, as parents know so well with their children ... growth in relationships, growth in the spiritual life, growth in knowledge and skills, growth in personal integrity and maturity. In a world where so much is fleeting and momentary, the discipline to allow time for things to take root and grow is a struggle. Imagine planting the acorn and then after a few days deciding no growth is happening, this is too slow ... so we dig it up and move it to another spot, and then another, and another ... never allowing the slow and steady mystery of its potential to unfold because we keep intervening and interrupting what has begun. ***Today, we can***

honor all parents, teachers, coaches, and others who give of their time to invest in children's time to grow, with patience, understanding, and trust like that of Joseph and Mary in the mystery of that home in Nazareth.

It is of course true that the all-powerful God can change us, and change the world, in an instant. But that is not the usual path. Jesus chose nine months in Mary's womb, and then the slow and gradual human development of One like us in all things but sin. He aged at the same rate we do. He chose hunger and thirst, nights of prayer and days of labor, the time it took to walk from Capernaum to Jerusalem, and even the three days in the tomb. He fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy from some eight centuries before: "*A bruised reed He shall not break, and a smoldering wick He shall not quench, until He brings forth justice for the nations; the coastlands will wait for His teaching.*" And elsewhere, Isaiah also records God's words: "*In patience and in waiting your strength lies.*" Paul teaches the same: we must walk by faith, not by sight, towards that fullness of life. If we settle only for what we can see, we are tempted to give up too soon, and we get no closer to what God has prepared for those who love Him.

On your way home today, pick out a tree to notice, and reflect for a moment ... what begins small, perhaps even unseen, can take root and grow into something remarkable ... if we give God time. What might He wish to grow in your life?