

16th Sunday in Ordinary Time

July 19, 2020

If we were ever asked to describe God, most of us would do reasonably well by simply repeating what the Church has taught us. We could use the words of the Nicene Creed, for example, which tells us that God is the “Father Almighty maker of heaven and earth.” The creed goes on to say that Jesus is “the only begotten son of God...one being with the Father,” and that the Holy Spirit is the “Lord and giver of life.” In using the creed to describe God, we would be benefiting from the two-thousand-year-old development of theology, philosophy, and faith practices based on the teaching of Jesus.

Speaking to ordinary people in a farming culture, Jesus, as we heard in the Gospel, did not use the abstract language of philosophy. He told stories called parables. Using familiar items like seeds, weeds, and yeast, and familiar activities like planting, harvesting, waiting and mixing dough, Jesus taught people about how God works in our world and in our humanity. How God works and how we experience God is one of the meanings of the expression, the Kingdom of God, or the Kingdom of Heaven. The expression is more of a verb than a noun. It doesn't primarily describe a physical place with a recognizable castlelike Disney's Magic Kingdom. Bishop Robert Barron says that the Kingdom of Heaven is the experience of divinity and humanity coming together in our lives, especially in the person of Jesus Christ.

So, as we heard, Jesus said that the Kingdom of Heaven was like a man who refused to tear up his whole field too soon and ruin a good harvest just so that he could get at the weeds. Jesus said that the Kingdom of Heaven was like a mustard seed. It starts small and grows slowly, but eventually, it creates an environment of welcome and safety. And Jesus said that the Kingdom of Heaven was like a little yeast, which had the power to raise about forty or fifty pounds of flour into dough to make bread. That's a lot of bread, and it's meant to feed a lot of people.

There are always layers of meaning in the Lord's parables. What stands out in these stories is how God's patience with us challenges our impatience with each other. Sometimes we're over-focused on the negative, the weeds of life. We're too quick to judge, uproot and toss people aside. Sometimes we're too quick to give up on the slow process of spiritual growth and maturity in ourselves and in other people. And sometimes, we won't stand with someone as they try to rise from death to new life through things like grief, anxiety, depression, and loneliness. God is patient with us, so that we can learn to be patient with ourselves and each other. St. Paul's advice to the Colossian church is good advice for us too. He says, “Therefore, as God's, chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.” Col 3:12

Fr. Valentine

Scripture Readings: <http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/071920.cfm>