

Happy feast day!!! This weekend we are celebrating our parish's feast day, the feast of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. The liturgical feast is on Saturday, but we are celebrating all weekend. Our parish picnic is after the 11:30am Mass.

Devotion to Mary's Immaculate Heart is closely tied to devotion to Jesus' Sacred Heart. The Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus was on Friday. These devotions find their roots in the Gospels. Even though the hearts of Jesus and Mary are only briefly mentioned in the Gospels their appearance is significant. *"Learn from Me for I am meek and humble of heart."*<sup>1</sup>, *"She kept in mind all these things, pondering them in Her Heart"*<sup>2</sup>, *"From His Heart will flow rivers of living water"*<sup>3</sup>, *"Your own soul a sword shall pierce"*<sup>4</sup>, *"One of the soldiers opened His side with a lance, and immediately there came out blood and water"*<sup>5</sup>. By the power of the Holy Spirit, Mary conceived the Heart of Jesus beneath her own Heart, later these Two Hearts are both pierced for our salvation. You can say that there is an alliance of the hearts of Jesus and Mary, an alliance to bring about the salvation of the world.

Written documentation of the devotions to Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary began to appear in the 13th century with St. Bonaventure. St. John Eudes founded the modern public

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1 Matthew 11:25

2 Luke 2:19

3 John 7:38 - based on the most reliable texts of the Gospel of St. John, which refers to the Heart of the Jesus. Most translations refer to the hearts of believers and are believed to have as their source a translation by Origen which contains a textual error.

4 Luke 2:35

5 John 19:34

devotion to the Two Hearts in the 1600's, but it was limited to a number of dioceses in France. It wasn't until 1944 that Pope Pius XII establish the feast of the Immaculate Heart of Mary for the universal Church, celebrated on August 22nd. But, because of the reform of the liturgical calendar after Vatican II, August 22nd was changed to the Feast of the Queenship of Mary. In 1969 Pope Paul VI moved the celebration of the Immaculate Heart of Mary to the Saturday immediately following the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, more closely associating the celebration of the two hearts as they should be.

The depictions of Mary's Immaculate Heart help us understand the devotion. They show it glowing with holiness, surrounded by roses of purity and sweetness, bursting with the fire of her love, and often pierced with a sword as foretold by Simeon. Mary's heart is filled with love for her Son and for us. It is a model for our own hearts, an example of the perfect love for which we should strive.

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We turn now to the readings for the 11<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary time. The Gospel, which presents the parables of the sleeping farmer and the mustard seed, follows shortly after another familiar parable involving seeds, the parable of the sower. Jesus used parables involving agriculture because the context would have been quite familiar to the people in Israel at the time, helping them understand the message. Since we do not live in an agrarian society, we may not always fully appreciate these parables.

When was the last time you planted a mustard seed?

The sleeping farmer, unaware of how the seeds become plants and ultimately produce grain, does, however, trust that they will. He knows that growth is inevitable, so he watches and waits for the seeds to germinate and grow. Other than sowing the seeds he knows that he has no control over the process.

Jesus tells the people that this is how it is with the kingdom of God. When the seeds of faith are sown, the kingdom will grow even if they don't understand exactly how. Like the seeds of plants, growth is intrinsic to the kingdom. The parable of the sleeping farmer would have assured the early Christians, though small in number, that their effort would be fruitful in growing the kingdom. We too can have the same assurance, our efforts in spreading the Good News will be fruitful, even if we don't see how.

There is a subtle point here to which I'd like to draw your attention. Though the farmer does not control the growth of the seeds, his role as sower is absolutely essential. Without the sower there would be no plants and no harvest. This is also true with the kingdom of God, although we often ignore it. Christians spreading the Good News is essential to the growth of the kingdom and necessary for the harvest. This was true in the first century and is true today.

It is important for us to recognize that God includes us in his plan for building His kingdom. This is no small thing, and I think more often than not we miss its importance. How often do we see

God as uninterested in us? How often do we see ourselves as unworthy to be useful to God? These thoughts could not be further from the truth. God passionately wants us to work with him. He loves us so much that he gives us an integral part to play in the salvation of the world. As with the farmer, sowing the seeds of the kingdom is our job and it is an essential job.

In thinking about this I came up with a parable of my own to help make the point. A man was walking through a field, carrying a sack of seeds. As he walked a few seeds slipped out of the seams of his sack. Only a few plants grew in the field and the harvest was very small. Another man walked through his field, also carrying a sack of seeds. But as he walked he intentionally scattered the seeds. In his field there were a great number plants and the harvest was large.

So it is with spreading the seeds of faith. If we are not intentional about our discipleship and only sow seeds casually, then there will only be a small harvest. But if we intentionally sow the seeds of faith, there will be a bountiful harvest. God has given us the responsibility – no, the honor – to be his co-workers in the building of his kingdom.

As Christians we are called to more than just believing in Jesus, we are called to spread our faith, we are called to evangelize. Evangelization is a lot like sowing seeds and watching the field, waiting for the plants to germinate. Our job is planting the seeds, not worrying when they will sprout. We don't know how people will react to our witness. We don't know how

our words and actions will touch them. But we can be sure that no seed sown will end up fruitless. Once we sow the seed of God's word, no matter how much we may want to hurry things along, it remains God's work. Conversion doesn't depend on our abilities. Rather it depends on how God's revelation touches each person's heart. But even if we can't see the growth, Jesus assures us that our work of sowing seeds will indeed bear fruit, if not today then tomorrow, if not tomorrow then in years to come.

What should we do? Our job is to keep sowing those tiny seeds, lots of them. Keep looking for opportunities to share God's Word, always trusting that God will take care of those seeds and make them grow, bearing fruit for his kingdom.

Like the mustard seed, the seeds we sow might be small, but they will produce results that exceed our expectations. Our little actions can yield abundant results, we know not how. But our little actions must be numerous for the harvest to be great.

There is a psalm-prayer in the Liturgy of the Hours that is appropriate for today:

*You command the seed to rise, Lord God, though the farmer is unaware. Grant that those who labor for you may trust not in their own work but in your help. Remembering that the land is brought to flower not with human tears but with those of your Son, may the Church rely only upon your gifts. Amen.*

**Gospel [Mk 4:26-34](#)**

Jesus said to the crowds:

“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 through it all 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.”

He said,

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

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.”

With many such parables

he spoke the word to them as they were able to understand it.

Without parables he did not speak to them,

but to his own disciples he explained everything in private.