

**First Reading:** Ezekiel 17:22-24.  
**Response:** ***"It is good to give thanks, O Lord"*** (Ps.91:2)  
**Responsorial Psalm:** Psalm 91:2,3,13-16  
**Second Reading:** 2 Corinthians 5:6-10  
**Gospel:** Mark 4:26-34.

The Church, full of new life, with the presence of the Risen Lord, like a tree, grows from smallness of a seed to greatness like a majestic Lebanon cedar. And birds of the air, other nations, come to make their home in it, in Christ the Risen Lord

***"In the earth the small seed  
is hidden and  
lies unseen until  
it is bidden by  
springtime stirrings up  
to the sunlight and  
summer ripening.  
Golden is the harvest  
and precious the  
bread that you are,  
and gave to us, Lord."***

(Estelle White, *Celebration Hymnal*. 1)

<p>WHITE, (Elizabeth) Estelle. b.1925, Tyneside, d. 2011. She learned to play the guitar and saxophone in her youth. She joined the army in 1943. After coming out of the army, she trained as physiotherapist and worked with children with cerebral palsy. Later in life she became a Catholic. Having discovered a love of words, she wrote a number of hymns.</p>
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Ezekiel gives an oracle of God, promising Israel in sin and exile, a future. ***"From the top of the cedar, from the highest branch I will take a shoot"*** (Ezek.17:22). God will plant a tender twig, the Messiah, whose Kingdom will grow and become a shelter for all.

This tree in the oracle of Ezekiel could also be prophetic of Calvary on which was the Prince of Peace. The wood will be ***"planted on a mountain of Israel and bear fruit and every kind of bird will live beneath it"*** (Ezek. 17:23).

Our God is deserving of all praise and thanksgiving: ***"It is good to give thanks, O Lord"*** (Ps.91: 2), and ***"to proclaim that the Lord is just"*** (Ps.91:16).

Being with our God is spiritual growth, to ***"be planted in the house of the Lord"*** (Ps.91:14) and to ***"grow like a Lebanon cedar"*** (Ps.91:13).

Paul, spells spiritual growth as being in Christ. We welcome death if it brings full communion, being ***"exiled from the body and making our home with the Lord"*** (2 Cor.5:6).

Until then we live in hope, not yet having the full vision of Christ, ***"going by faith and not by sight"*** (2 Cor.5:7) and ***"be intent on pleasing God"*** (2 Cor.5:9).

Jesus compares growing in faith, being in the kingdom, to ***'earth bringing forth fruit'*** (Mk.4:28), beyond understanding, ***'man knows not how'*** (*ibid.*) and personal growth, like ***'first the shoot, then the ear, then the full grain'*** (*ibid.*) and communal, ***'big branches for birds of the air'*** (32)

In spite of its lowly beginning the kingdom will exceed every hope and grow. ***"It is the smallest of all"***

**seeds; yet it grows into the biggest shrub of them all" (Mk. 4:32).**

***"In me, Oh my Lord, plant  
the seed of love  
nourished by your body  
and by your blood.  
May my soul take wings  
and rise upwards to  
new awakenings!  
Golden is the light of  
your Godhead that  
by love you have,  
and give to us, Lord."***

The **Gospel** shows how faith and the Kingdom, like a small seed, will grow into a big tree.

**Liturgy** is the gathered people of God, Body of Christ, Kingdom growing in Church with sacraments.

**Doctrine:** The founding and growth of the Kingdom, stems not from human action but divine.

**Witness** to the Kingdom by working with God in faith, hope, love and readiness to serve.

### **FOR CHILDREN**

Share Mark's Gospel today on the two parables of growth and how it applies to our lives.

See God's people at Worship on Sunday. It began with Jesus and friends and now worldwide Church.

Explain Teachings on growth, like planting and seeing changes, but God actually makes things grow.

Seek Ways of growing in faith and helping others do the same, such as prayer, service and love.

### **FOR TEENAGERS** (*Shared Christian Praxis*)

**My Present Action:** *What does it mean to grow spiritually?*

**Your Story and Vision:** *Have you experiences to share on spiritual growth?*

**Church's Story:** Show how the Church grew in numbers, when and where spiritually.

**Church's Story and Your Story:** *What are your spiritual experiences in the Church?*

**Your Vision and Church's Vision:** *How do you see your and Church future in world spiritually?*

### **RCIA**

In many parishes the RCIA begun in previous year, now ends with the *mystagogy*, post-baptismal catechesis. A new era of RCIA begins as well. For both old and new, this year, is time to grow spiritually in different ways. "Spiritual progress tends towards ever more intimate union in the mystery of Christ. This union is called mystical because it participates in the mystery of Christ through the sacraments – 'the holy mysteries' – and, in him, in the mystery of the Holy Trinity. God calls us all to this intimate union with him, even if the special graces or extraordinary signs of this mystical life are granted only to some for the sake of manifesting the gratuitous gift given to all." (*Catechism of Catholic Church. 2014*).

### **IMPORTANT WORD:**

### **'Growth', in the parables of the Kingdom.**

'*Spiritus est actus.*' The Spirit is action, not static. It is dynamic, it is life, it is growth. That is what spiritual life is all about, growing in the Spirit. Little wonder that Jesus' parables of the Kingdom are about growth, like a seed growing into a tree. Jesus' words for growing, in the original Greek, are from *μεκυνται* (*mekuntai*) and *αναβαινει* (*anabainei*). The former means growing in the sense of becoming longer, taller. *Αναβαινει* (*Anabainei*), means to go up, rise up, interestingly translated into Hebrew in the New Testament as *עלה* (*'alah*), which means not only grow but blossom. Another translation into Hebrew here for growth is *גידול* (*giydol*), (*Mk.4:32*), meaning 'to grow into something great. Our growth, our spiritual destiny, the *Didache* describes as the 'Way of Life, 'οδος της ζωης<sup>1</sup> (*hodos tes zoes*) and Barnabas describes as the 'Way of Light, 'οδος της φωτος<sup>2</sup> (*hodos tou photos*).

<sup>1</sup> APOSTOLIC FATHERS. *DIDACHE I.I.* Translated by Kirsopp Lake. Harvard University Press, Mass. 1965. p.309.

<sup>2</sup> APOSTOLIC FATHERS. *Opus cit. EPISTLE OF BARNABAS.* XIX. 7. p.404.

**WATCHWORD:** "The just will flourish like a palm tree" (Ps. 92:13) 'and grow like a Lebanon cedar.'

Hebrew: צדיק כתמר יפרח (Tzadiq katamar yipherah).

Greek: Δίκαιος ως φοινίξ ανθησει. (Dikaios hos phoiniks anthesei).

Latin: Justus ut palma florebit.

### **LIVING OUR FAITH TODAY AS A FAMILY**

#### **FAMILY AND PARABLE OF THE SEED (Living the Parable at home)**

- Have a little ceremony of a family planting a mustard seed or any other seed. The family cares for it and members take turns to water it and could have a special jug used to water it.
- Suggest to your Parish Priest that he has a box of seeds on a special Sunday in which he blesses the seeds, and every family take a seed home to plant.
- Say a thanksgiving prayer for the plant. Remember it is God's way of giving you an oxygen-machine. Plants breathe in carbon dioxide (used air) and breathe out oxygen (fresh air).
- Discuss life in all forms, including family life. Discuss how human life is sown in "the deep soil"<sup>1</sup> of humanity, in the sacredness of the womb, in holy ground. Explain how God makes the fertilized human seed grow and how it is loved and cared for in the family.
- The family prays for children who do not have families and nobody to care for them. Pray for such children and orphans every time you water the plant. The plant will remind you to pray.
- The day may come for harvesting when the plant may have served its purpose. It could be a time to take stock as a family and how it has developed; and it may be time to plant again.
- As a family visit a park and look at the trees. It is a family way of teaching children to appreciate God's creation. Read about or watch a movie of *St. Francis of Assisi*, lover of nature.
- What is your favourite plant? Get a nice picture of it. You can even keep a leaf of your favourite plant in the Bible, placing God's creation and God's word together.

And don't forget, the cross is from a tree, on which was wrought our salvation.

<sup>1</sup> PHILO OF ALEXANDRIA. *The Contemplative Life, The Giants, and Selections.* D.Winston. Paulist Press. p.183.

### **VIGNETTES OF MY LIFE**

Part of life at Cedara, in the 1960's was sport. Allan was at home playing cricket and soccer but not rugby. Because he was quite good on the wing in soccer, he was forced to play the same position in rugby. There was a day when the seminary had play a game against Cedara Agricultural College. Most of their inmates big Afrikaner farm-hands and bruisers. Allan remembers his first game when the ball was suddenly thrown to him and everyone shouted run and he saw two huge brawlers bearing down on him. Afraid of what they might do if he got caught, he ran for his life. He made it to the line and scored a try and was cheered. He never scored such a dramatic try again because he decided it was not really his game and had intention to keep running for his life.

Besides the studies at *Cedara*, the students did apostolic work. Some taught catechism to children who came to St. Joseph's. Others went visiting the local poor homes. *Barry Wood* was among those who visited a nearby Indian village, giving them religious instruction. *Rodney Boyd* and Allan looked to the local poor children and started the *Chiro* movement. It catered religiously, for the same age as for Boy Scouts and Girl Guides. Two nuns worked with them and dressed in *Chiro* uniforms. The *Chiro* children helped build a *Chiro* hut at Cedara. During one of the holidays, Rodney and Allan took a group of Zulu boys for a few days by the sea. The Oakford sisters at *Gena Zano* agreed they could camp there. Rodney obtained a big tent for them. In those days, trains stopped at *Cedara* station. In fact, it was the most regular way of travelling to *Pietermaritzburg*. Cars were limited, even among professors. Fr. *Gerald O'Hara* had a motor-bike which he shared with Fr. *Karl Struve*. Rodney and Allan travelled with the Zulu children by train but could not sit in the same compartments. It was a problem because whenever the train stopped they would be seen running on the platform and would have to be ushered back into the train. Transport was arranged from *Durban* to *Gena Zano*. It was a great experience for these children to be near the sea and important that none be on the beach alone because they couldn't swim. They were terribly aware of how a student caused Zulu children to drown in the dam at *Cedara*. It could not be that any Zulu children from *Cedara* died by the sea, least of all under Rodney's and Allan's charge.

Apart from the joy of the sea, there was only one fearful sight, the black mamba. There were a number this species seen in the local bushes, and local residents warned all visitors to be careful. It so happened that one evening one of the boys in a sleeping-bag, was lying in a paralytic state of fear. Had he been bitten by a snake? Not yet. He spoke in anxious whispers that a snake had crawled into his sleeping-bag. He could feel the cold serpent against his feet, seeking warmth. All stood around the helpless child in the bag praying. Two persons quietly held the bottom end of the bag while Allan and Rodney got their arms under the victim's shoulders to drag him out slowly. He whispered that as he was being dragged out slowly, the snake kept moving closer to his feet. From outside, the form could be seen following his feet. It was a long and slow process and prayer. It was a fight for life, fighting Satan (serpent), not *qua eminus*, from a distance, but *cominus* (*con-manus*), a hand-to-hand, at close quarters, right here in the sleeping bag. Eventually, when the little boy was finally jerked out, everybody attacked the lump with sticks and stones, hitting it as hard as they can, shouting and cursing, until the lump in the sleeping-bag was leveled and flattened. Then the sleeping-bag was emptied, and out came pieces of metal, batteries and glass. The cold lump in the sleeping-bag had been a torch rolling against the feet of the child.

Apart from some students leaving *Cedara*, some professors left as well. There was *Seamus Kieran OMI*, from Ireland, who taught Metaphysics, then Social Anthropology. After he did his doctorate at Manchester University, he seemed to have lost his faith and became some sort of an agnostic. The biggest surprise was *Jan Zacharewicz OMI*, from Poland, who was a brilliant professor of Sacred Scripture. Being a great inspiration to the students it was a great shock when he left the priesthood. There is always a sadness when somebody leaves and the biggest blow came when Allan learned that his father was about to leave this life. He was dying of cancer. Students could not go home to Durban, let alone to England. He was facing the first challenge of his vocation, his body was with the Oblates but his heart was with his family. Was the Spirit there to guide him? Could Allan go to see his father, or would he never see his him again? He would soon learn how much his father needed him, more than the Oblates. What was he to do?

## **WHAT AM I THINKING?**

I was thinking of the brazen beggar at the door. He was demanding a jacket because he was cold. I went upstairs and gave him the oldest of the two I had. When handing it to him, he asked if I could not have given him something better. I took back the old one and gave him the new, knowing I could get myself another if I wished. When I gave it to him, he politely asked if I could put it in a decent bag for him to carry. Fortunately, there were a number of bags upstairs. When I returned and handed it to him, he said "Is that all?"

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Couldn't you put in something else with the jacket?"

Somehow I happily complied. When he left I couldn't believe myself, having been so patient with a petulant beggar. If only I was thus always, if it was my personality? I knew that it was not the real me. I don't normally have such a serving disposition but rather as *Savonarola* says, "a heart that 'changes as the seasons do.'"<sup>1</sup> I got an insight into what I could be and how to grow. I thank God for moments of spiritual growth. I suppose they are always there but I don't advert to them, missing opportunities to be of humble service and follow the Master. I know at other times I would have been indignant with the beggar and sent him away empty-handed. Now, I am thinking, as an old grey-beard, to learn to serve, not just peremptorily but promptly with charity.

<sup>1</sup> **APOCALYPTIC SPIRITUALITY—TREATISES AND LETTERS OF LACTANTIUS, ADSO OF MONTIER-ENDER, JOACHIM OF FIORE, THE SPIRITUAL FRANCISCANS, SAVONAROLA.** Tr. B. McGinn. Paulist Press, N.J. 1979. p.220.