

Archbishop Lori's Homily: Friday, 3rd Week in Ordinary Time; Votive Mass of the Sacred Heart

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Knights of Columbus Board Meeting

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Introduction

It wasn't all that long ago that the pace of life was slower. And maybe it's just my imagination but people used to seem more patient, more civil, and more tolerant of hardship and even suffering. As the pace of life accelerates, people are less patient, civil, and tolerant. I see this in myself – let me give you a workaday example. Throughout my academic studies, I used a typewriter. If I didn't leave enough room at the bottom of the page for footnotes, I had to type the whole page over – and that happened to me a lot. When I started working in the chancery office, I used carbon paper to make copies of letters and memos. So if now I had to trade in my laptop for my Smith-Corona, I'd be upset and impatient.

Sometimes, I think, our impatience with the ordinary things of life is a symptom of a more profound impatience found in the deep well of our hearts. Since we think that everything should be at our fingertips in an instant, we are impatient with ourselves for not quickly measuring up to our self-image, or for not measuring up to the talented and prosperous people all around us. For example, I may wonder why I can't preach like Bishop Robert Barron. Come to think of it, you might be wondering about that too! The point is that when we're disappointed with ourselves, we can try harder, or give up, or daydream about what our lives could be like.

As I'm sure you know, those same attitudes spill over into our spiritual lives. We grow dismayed by our readiness to cave into temptation. Our efforts to grow in virtue often seem slow and halting — one step forward and two backwards. Often we

are discouraged when suffering comes our way, whether it stems from our weakness and folly, or from our duty to suffer for the faith we profess. In our instantaneous and pain-adverse world, patience, endurance, and cheerfulness amid life's trials are hard to come by. Perhaps that Pope Francis meant when recently he spoke of 'the weariness of hope.'

How the Seed of Faith Grows

If you've ever experienced anything like the foregoing, then perhaps you will find consolation in the two short parables in today's Gospel, two "word pictures" Jesus employs to show us how the seed of faith grows. The seed of faith grows much like the seed planted in the ground, that is to say, slowly, almost imperceptibly, and seemingly of its own accord. By stages the land naturally yields first the blade, then the ear, then the grain.

Presuming there is good soil in our hearts and that we are tending it, the seed of faith planted there in Baptism grows slowly, according to the design of God's grace and mercy, and sometimes, without our realizing it. We can and must cooperate with God's grace but it is God who gives the growth. Simply put, we are saved not by our own efforts but by God's mercy. I don't know about you, but I find this a consoling thought when I grow impatient with myself and my efforts seem so futile.

The a second parable Jesus offers us today is that of the mustard seed – a tiny seed that grows into a huge shrub that becomes home for the birds of the air. That is how the Kingdom of God grows in our midst! Come to think of it, his Kingdom had a most inauspicious beginning: via an itinerant Preacher and twelve uneducated men, one of whom was a traitor. Yet, it has spread the world over—embracing every nation, language, and culture. This growth has been due, not to human planning and effort, but rather to God's hidden power at work in our midst, doing immeasurably more than we could ever ask or imagine. This is something for you and me to hold on to in these difficult days when the Church is beset by scandal and controversy. So we need to be patient as God works within us personally; but we also need to be patient as God works out his mysterious designs in history.

How To Wait for the Seed to Grow

If the Gospel parables teach us how the seed of faith grows in us and in our world, the Letter to the Hebrews instructs us on how we should wait for that seed to grow. It grows because of God's mysterious workings in us and in history but that does not mean that we are to be passive or disengaged. Rather, God uses the prayers, sacrifices, & sufferings of those he enlightens in Baptism to advance the coming and the growth of his Kingdom in our midst. Addressing a congregation whose first fervor for the faith had cooled, the author of Hebrews reminded them that, in becoming baptized Christians, they signed up for sufferings and hardships, which he then proceeds to describe. They were exposed to public ridicule, to searing criticism, to loss of reputation; they shared in the sufferings of the Apostles who were incarcerated and martyred; they lost not only their property but also their basic human rights.

Suffering indignity after indignity, those early Christians may have wondered if the Kingdom of God were real or if it were beyond their grasp, or its full joy would ever dawn upon them. Suffering far less for our faith than the early Christians, don't we sometimes wonder what the future holds for our Church and its mission, for ourselves and our families, and our loved ones? Don't we wonder if the seed of faith really is growing in us and in our world?

The Letter to the Hebrews addresses our fears by teaching us how we are to wait for the coming of the Kingdom in our midst - viz., with two qualities of mind and heart that right now seem to be in short supply. First is confidence - "Do not throw away your confidence" - the author exhorts us! In other words, don't lose your boldness of faith, your unbounded trust in God! As our souls are irrigated by the waters of baptism and nourished by the Body and Blood of Christ, let us not imagine that the seed of faith is dormant or dead or powerless, no matter how great the challenges we face may be. The second quality of mind and heart is patient endurance - This is more than the stiff upper lip or the gritting of our teeth! Patient endurance means being cheerful and steadfast in the face of adversity, happy to suffer for our faith, happy to profess it when it isn't popular to do so, happy to soldier on, recognizing that we are not in a sprint but a marathon - a joy and a peace that nothing and no one can take away from us. Confidence and patient endurance: this is how we are to await the Kingdom. This is how we are to wait for the seed planted in us and in our world to grow.

May we, in this Eucharist, now draw near with confidence to the Throne of Grace, as we prepare to receive Jesus in the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar. For the One who is to come will not delay and will be with us until the end of the age! May God bless us and keep us always in his love!