



The Word...

“I, too, will take from the crest of the cedar,
from its topmost branches tear off a tender shoot,
and plant it on a high and lofty mountain; ...
It shall put forth branches and bear fruit,
and become a majestic cedar”
(Ez 17:22-24).

“They shall bear fruit even in old age”
(Ps 92).

“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”
(Mk 4:26-34)

Pondering the Word ...

When we started this liturgical year, we talked about “Another Way. Something New” as being the theme we’d look for in Scripture. The readings today fit well into that theme, with a little twist. The message for today is “Expect the Unexpected!”

In the OT reading, we hear about a tender shoot being planted atop a high mountain where it will be exposed to the elements, hanging on in strong winds to send roots deep into the rocky ground, to grow strong and thrive. It will even come to bear fruit, which, since cedars don’t bear fruit in a literal sense, would be considered miraculous (Alter, *The Hebrew Bible*, p.1099). And the psalm is so reassuring to those of my vintage, that, as God wills, we will continue to bear fruit even in old age.

Of course, farming today employs science unknown in Jesus’ time as described in the gospel, but we know, farming still involves a bit of mystery and a healthy dose of faith.

In our lives, where technology has given us an illusion of control, the surprises that spring up—the unexpected storm that cuts off roads or the electricity, the injury or illness that forces us to slow down—these things remind us that indeed, we are not in control. No matter how we may want to orchestrate every detail, life is a mystery, and we are the happiest when in faith, we can accept what is given—all that is given—as gift.

We “know not how” the Lord works in our lives, but in faith, we know that God works for good, and that given time, love, and acceptance, all will bear good fruit.

“Life is what happens to you while you’re busy making other plans.” (John Lennon)

Living the Word ...

With so much going on that is out of our control, you, like me, might feel a pull to hold tightly to what we can. This just adds even more to our stress levels! (See Saturday’s gospel for Jesus’ advice!) This week, start each day with a conscious spoken prayer to relinquish control. Think about writing down each day the things you put in God’s hands. Ask for the Spirit’s grace to accept as gift all that comes your way.

Personal Reflections and Ideas ...

Mon, Jun 17: *"Proclaim a fast and set Naboth at the head of the people. Get two scoundrels to accuse him of having cursed God and king. Take him out and stone him to death."* His fellow citizens did as Jezebel had ordered (1 Kgs 21:1-16). File this under "things haven't changed much." Spreading lies, character assassinations, threats and instances of violence... sounds like a normal day in the political realm. **Reflection/Provision:** One thing that gives me pause is that the people blindly follow these evil directions. They are Naboth's neighbors. They know him to be a righteous man. The so-called "elders" go along without question. Think of the Holocaust, think of divisions in communities and families today. Think about the news we take at face value without researching and making our own decisions (guilty as charged). We look at OT stories as abhorrent, but we must face this reality: this kind of thing is happening right now. Reflect on how you will stand up to evil and lies.

Tue, Jun 18: *"Love your enemies... if you greet your brothers only, what is unusual about that?"* (Mt 5:43-48). Throughout his ministry, Jesus interacted with all kinds of people: the elders looking to get rid of him, Canaanites, Samaritans, the rich, the poor, the afflicted, demoniacs. All of these could, by some definition, have been viewed as his "enemy." But did Jesus think about others as enemies? **Reflection:** We tend to hang with and listen to those whose opinions mesh with our own. I ask myself: do I look at others who see things differently as enemies? Not personal enemies, but enemies to the way I think life should be? One easy way to love one's enemies is to not have any, to get rid of that designation once and for all. That is surely a means to take away the enemy's power...especially if the only "enemies" you encounter are within.

Wed, Jun 19: *"When you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret"* (Mt 6:1-6,16-18). The literal translation refers to your "private" room. Archeologists studying in ancient Israel have uncovered ruins of homes that appear to have "inner rooms." They speculate it was a place where activists could hide from the Romans. **Reflection/Provision:** Do you have a private room where you can listen for the Spirit? Jesus is not referring to a physical space; he means praying from your heart. The wonderful thing is that you take this inner room with you wherever you go, to retreat from the chaos and noise. Some people are afraid of this inner room, not sure of what they will find or hear. You give up control. If this is how you feel, start slowly. Find a quiet room or place and pray silently, just for five minutes, "Come Holy Spirit, renew the depths of my heart." Be patient. Be persistent. Opening the door to this room takes time and practice!

Thu, Jun 20: *"Your will be done"* (Mt 6:7-15). **Reflection/Provision:** The prayer Jesus taught us is a great one on which to base our own version, to put the sentiments into our own words. "Why would we do that," you ask, "when Jesus has given us the exact words?" I've worked with people for whom praying to a "father" brings fear rather than comfort, so use "My Creator, My Source, My Breath," whatever name you have for God. I like to think God delights when we have a special name for God. I add a word of thanks: "I thank you for giving me my daily bread, what I need today." I try not to pray the "Our Father" as a rote prayer but focus on each line and personalize it: "Open my eyes to see your kingdom come and your will be done on earth today. Give me the grace to be one who brings your kingdom." Today, take 15 minutes to pray this prayer, dwelling on every line. See if you can personalize it, changing it from a recited prayer to one from your inner room.

Fri, Jun 21: *"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, store up treasures in heaven...For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be"* (Mt 6:19-23). *"Upon him my crown shall shine"* (Ps 132). **Reflection:** *"A fable: once upon a time, there was a crown so heavy that it could only be worn by one who remained completely oblivious to its glitter"* (Dag Hammarskjöld, from *Markings*, p.53).

Sat, Jun 22: *"No one can serve two masters. He will either hate one and love the other... You cannot serve God and mammon"* (Mt 6:24-34). **Reflection/Provision:** This is one of the many verses I like to talk to Jesus about. We see all too clearly those for whom money and power are their gods, those who trample the poor in their efforts to build their bank accounts. But I'd say for most of us, it's not so clear cut. I love and want to serve God, and yet I am quite comfortable. Am I covetous? No. Do I "worship" money? No, but I surely benefit from what money brings me. Spend time reflecting on this. Consider if there are material things you can do without so as to share your bounty with others. Ask yourself: "What do I really need?" *"I own nothing, so I get to enjoy everything!"* (A Franciscan monk at Assisi).