

From the prophet Ezekiel, we heard a grand prophecy: A great tree to be planted above Israel. Maybe the hearers of this prophecy interpreted it quite literally. After all, Israel for the most part is a great desert, especially around Jerusalem. A great tree would offer continual fruit and shade; many birds would be beneath it, birds I might add that could be used for food. What a boon to Israel such a great tree would be!

Never would the Israelites have imagined that the tree about which Ezekiel prophesized was the cross of Jesus Christ. This is the great tree which produces an overflowing abundance of fruit. From this tree flows salvation, mercy, forgiveness of our sins, healing and grace. From this tree the abundance of heaven is poured down upon the earth. The Israelites would never have imagined that from the tree of crucifixion such blessings would have been poured down upon all of humanity.

So too in our lives. Could we imagine that from the crosses God allows in our lives that any good could come, let alone a great abundance? Yet I have seen it, many times over. Through sickness, someone who has been away from God comes to their senses and returns to Him or through sickness people who are faithful to God are drawn into an intimate union with God, one like they've never know before. Because of the grace of funeral masses, people return to the Church. The moment of loss for them becomes a moment of reconciliation with God. Or the struggle for some with sin and temptation becomes the pathway of humility and complete dependence on God. Financial burdens and fears become the way of deeper trust in God and a revelation of God's desire to care for us.

We instinctively run from the crosses in our lives because we don't believe that any good can come from them, but with God, good, even great good, can come from our crosses. This is shown to us above all in the cross of Jesus, the tree of life. This is a mystery to us, how God can use the crosses of our lives to build up the Kingdom of God. But God's ways are not our ways and God's thoughts are not our thoughts and we cannot always figure God out.

This is the meaning of the Parables today: the seed rises and grows, the farmer knows not how. The smallest mustard seed grows into the largest of shrubs. The Kingdom of God grows in ways that we can't always understand and so our response in the face of our crosses must always be:

- 1) humility – that God knows what He's doing, even if I can't always figure it out
- 2) trust – that if I put my crosses in Jesus' hands He will not let me down and will always carry me through to what is good.

This is how Jesus was as He hung on the cross: Humble before the Father and trusting Him to the end.

Given by Father Mark Gurtner at Our Lady of Good Hope Catholic Church, Fort Wayne, Indiana, on the 11th Sunday of Ordinary Time, 2012.