

**THE SMALLEST OF SEEDS, BUT IT GROWS TO BECOME THE LARGEST OF ALL GARDEN PLANT -
Biblical Commentary by P. Ricardo Perez Marquez (during the hospitalization of F. Alberto Maggi)**

Mark 4,26-34

And he said, "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how. The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come."

And he said, "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when sown on the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth, yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and puts out large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade."

With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it. He did not speak to them without a parable, but privately to his own disciples he explained everything.

At the conclusion of the story of the parables in Mark's Gospel chapter 4, Jesus presents two parables that announce the potential, of the power and force that is in his message. Let's read, chapter 4,26 of Mark's Gospel

He said, "*the Kingdom of God...*," we know that the Kingdom of God is the alternative society that Jesus comes to propose, a society in which instead of accumulating for oneself there is the joy of sharing, and where rather than commanding there is service.

"... a man should scatter seed on the ground." Jesus has already spoken of the sower that sows seeds in this chapter. The seeds are his words, his message. Jesus' predilection is for reflecting agricultural life in his message, in his good news, there is a strength that unleashes the vital progress of growth and nutrition in the individual.

Jesus says: "*He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how. The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear.*" This growth, refers to: "*...and with the measure you use it will be measured to you.*" (Matthew 7. 2)

That which Jesus assures us and wants to say is that the assimilation of the message is the intimate and personal process into which no one can interfere. "... *when the grain is ripe*," here the evangelist uses the word "to deliver", which is the same as used for the betrayal. What is the meaning of "when the fruit is ready to deliver itself?"

To deliver oneself means to collaborate with Jesus' works until the end, even to the risk of one's life. "... *at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.*"

This is an image of great joy. We need to refer back to the world of agriculture when the harvest is the most important feast, its enough to think of the songs and verses in the Psalms. Psalm 126 where it says. "... reap with shouts of joy!"

Therefore it is not a negative sign, an image of judgment, but one full of joy, the person realizes himself and enters into the full happiness when, like Jesus, is able to donate himself.

That which Jesus is assuring us of is that man and Jesus' message are made for one another. If they do not meet, they remain sterile, but when they meet, the man strengthens and frees all those potentials, that force, that energy of love that one encounters with Jesus' words, the good news, they are able to give freedom.

And Jesus continues: "*With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it?*" And here Jesus refers to the traditional image in the book of the prophet Ezekiel chapter 17 where the Kingdom of God was likened to a cedar, the king of trees, on the top of a very high mountain, something that attracts attention for its magnificence. Nothing of all this. Jesus says: "*It is like a grain of mustard seed..*" we know that a mustard seed is tiny, not even a millimeter in diameter: "... *which, when sown on the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth, yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants..*"

One would expect, knowing the prophet Ezekiel, that the greatest of all trees would grow, however Jesus says with profound irony "...*becomes larger than all the garden plants..*". The mustard tree the mustard shrub grows in the garden. A shrub insignificant, it does not attract attention with its magnificence. It grows to a meter and a half in the highest part, along the banks of the Sea of Galilee sometimes as high as three meters, but it is a common plant, and needs no attention.

So, what is it that Jesus wants to say to us? That the Kingdom, even in the moment of its greatest development, it will not be striking, triumphant or spectacular, but a modest reality. So, with these two words Jesus assures that the person that receives his message that this will bear fruit, because it has a great power, only it requires patience, because the growth is slow.

The other message is that the Kingdom of God is already, there is no need to expect some spectacular manifestation of this Kingdom, there are small modest realities, but living and life-giving. Therefore the Kingdom of God will exist where there are communities that have welcomed his message.

To conclude, "*With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it.*"

To the extent that Jesus gave the gift of his life, one understands his message. And the evangelist concludes "*He did not speak to them without a parable, but privately to his own disciples he explained everything*" It is the

seventh time that the evangelist uses this term “privately”. And each time it means misunderstanding, if not hostility, on the part of his disciples.

There is still a long way to go before understanding the reality of the kingdom of God.