

(IT) ..IS THE SMALLEST OF ALL THE SEEDS ON EARTH, YET WHEN IT IS GROWN IT GROWS UP AND BECOMES LARGER THAN ALL THE GARDEN PLANTS...

Biblical Commentary by Father Alberto Maggi OSM

Mark 4,26-34

And he said,(to the crowd) “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.

To illustrate the reality of the kingdom of God Jesus loves images taken from nature, from the agricultural world with the vital process of growth and maturation. In the fourth chapter verse 26 in Mark's gospel he writes, “.. *the kingdom of God,*” it is the alternative society where rather than accumulating for oneself, one shares generously with others, and where rather than commanding one is at service to others “.. *is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground.*” Jesus has already spoken of seeds, it is his word, that scattered on the ground in three different places it is a total failure, but in one place the gain repays the losses made.

The evangelist wants to say that in man there are energies that, in contact with the message, free all their potentials. And in fact he says.” *He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how.*” The assimilation of the message is an intimate and personal process in which no one can intervene. Then Jesus adds “*The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear.*” this process indicates what Jesus said in the land bearing fruit the 30%, 60% and 100%. In mankind the acceptance of this message frees the energy for the fullness of the maturation.

And then “..*when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come*” literally when the fruit is delivered, it speaks of the delivery of the fullness of love. Harvesting in the agricultural world was the most happy and joyous festival of the whole year because the neighbours, the relatives were called to collaborate in this harvest. So to say harvest in the ancient world meant to say party, to say joy, happiness. So it is a sign of fullness of life that is realized in joy, in happiness.

Jesus continues and says “ *With what can we compare the kingdom of God,..?*” He knew what it was compared to. The prophet Ezekiel , in chapter 17, compared the kingdom of God to a cedar, the cedar is the king of trees, that grows on high mountains, it is something extraordinary and beautiful that attracts attention from a distance. Not for Jesus. The kingdom of God, even in its moment of maximum growth, will be a modest, effective reality that will not attract attention.

For this Jesus uses the comparison to a mustard seed, that is the smallest of all the seeds, that is sown in earth and says Jesus with profound irony “..*yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants,*” It is in a garden not on a high mountain like the cedar, the king of trees, but a simple house garden. The mustard shrub is in places where the climate allows it to reach two meter or more. It is an insignificant plant, it is not noticed for its splendour or beauty. This is how the kingdom will be. Even in the moment of maximum splendour, the

maximum realization it will not be noticed for its richness or splendour, *“it grows up ... and puts out large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.”*

And the evangelist continues saying that Jesus *“With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it.”* It is love and to have given one's own life for others that makes Jesus words understood. So the more we give ourselves to others, the more we live in harmony with love and the more that this word is understood it penetrates into man, puts the roots and transforms him. Mankind and Jesus' message are made for each other and if they do not meet they can remain sterile, but when they meet there is this flowering, this greatness of love that becomes reality.