

**“Of its own accord, the land yields fruit...”**

*In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

**Once upon a time**, in the early days of baseball, there weren't any reinforced, concrete stadiums. There was only a grandstand & a board fence, enclosing the outfield. Sometimes the wooden fence had a knothole in it. Small boys would flock around it to get a free glimpse of the game inside. The knothole didn't give a good view, but it was good enough to get an idea of what was going on.

Some ballpark fences had several knotholes in them, at least one in the left field, one in the center field, & one in the right field. By moving from one to the other, a boy could get a different view of the game and a pretty good idea of what was going on inside.

Now, 'Why am I talking to you about knotholes in old, baseball field fences?' you ask.

**Well—I'm glad you asked that question!** (You'll miss me when I am gone!)

You see, the parables of Jesus are a lot like knotholes in the old ballpark fence-of-life. They give one a glimpse of God's kingdom. They don't necessarily give one a good view, but, nevertheless, it gives one an idea of what the kingdom is like—'what's going on inside,' so to speak.

Take today's Gospel, which I/deacon just read to you. It contains 3 different parables about God's kingdom. By moving from one to another, one can get 3 different views of the kingdom. Interestingly, all 3 parables are about 'seeds.'

**1<sup>st</sup>** the parable is about a farmer, who planted seed. As always, some was planted in good soil, some in bad soil. We know from life, only seed in good soil bears fruit.

**2<sup>nd</sup>** part of the parable tells how the seed grows beneath the soil, without the farmer knowing anything about germination. It's a complete mystery to him as to how the seed actually grows.

**3<sup>rd</sup>** parable, the Gospel contrasts a tiny seed to the large, beautiful plant that grows from it.

Each parable gives a **different** insight into God's kingdom:

**1<sup>st</sup>** parable reveals that the kingdom can only grow in 'good hearts'—hearts that are **open** to God's grace, His presence, his indwelling.

**2<sup>nd</sup>** the parable reveals that God's kingdom grows in hearts in marvelous, **mysterious** ways—unknown to us.

**3<sup>rd</sup>** parable reveals that the tiny seed of the kingdom in hearts will, **eventually**, grow into something hugely beautiful.

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One of the strangest seeds in the world is the Chinese Bamboo Tree seed. It is buried in the soil for 5 years before any sprout appears.

Think of it—5 years! All during this time, the seed must be cultivated, i.e., watered & fertilized regularly.

Finally, the big surprise happens. When it emerges from the ground, it grows to a height of 90 feet in just 6 weeks!

The reason why it takes so long to emerge & grows so fast when it does, is that, during its first 5 years beneath the soil, the bamboo seed is busy building an elaborate root-system, able to sustain its 90 foot height in such a short time.

The seed of God's kingdom is like the seed of the Chinese Bamboo tree. It takes a long time to emerge. Take me for an example: I was in the seminary, beneath ground, so to speak, for 12 years.

(And **then** look what happened!)

Sometimes, it takes so long that we begin to wonder if that seed, planted in us at baptism, ever took root. Maybe it fell on a rock-hard heart & died. Maybe it was choked-off by thorns of sin.

**But**, & there's that proverbial **BUT** again, when such doubts begin to challenge us, this is where the story of the Chinese Bamboo tree helps...God's kingdom requires an elaborate, root-system in each of us. Eventually, something beautiful will emerge. We must have faith, as well as hope.

**Now, practically speaking, what does all this mean for us? It means 2 things:**

**1<sup>st</sup>**, it means we must **trust** God. He planted the seed of his kingdom inside us. He understands what's happening in our heart, even when we don't.

**2<sup>nd</sup>**, we need to be **patient**. We must keep on cultivating the seed inside us, especially by praying & receiving the sacraments regularly.

One personal model of the **trust & patience** we need... is provided by fathers & mothers. Raising a family takes lots of trust & patience.

**1<sup>st</sup>**, it takes a lot of **trust**. Parents can't be with their kids 24/7, so they must learn to trust them. And, often as not, that trust is betrayed. What do parents do when this happens? They learn to forgive the child & go on trusting, again. If this betrayal is constant, then we get into **'tough-love,'** and that's a whole **other 'kettle of fish.'**

**2<sup>nd</sup>**, raising a family takes a lot of **patience**. Sometimes, parents see little evidence of maturity in a child. Sometimes, what the **child** thinks is maturity turns out...NOT to be. When this happens, parents learn the **real** meaning of love & go on loving their child **even more...** & go on being **patient**.

It's the same way with the seed of God's kingdom in our **own** heart. We must **trust God & be patient**. God is trying to grow something special in us, something infinitely more complex than a mere Bamboo tree!

Our job, right now, is to nurture it, **trustfully & patiently**, i.e., by praying, trying our best to perceive his will for us—one day at a time & receiving the Sacraments regularly.

I close with an early Father's Day prayer... with a prayer of a wife... for her husband:

**"Lord, place your hand on his shoulder.  
Whisper your voice in his ear.  
Put your love in his heart.  
Help him fulfill your plan in his life."**

May that very God bless **all** fathers ... and mothers ...and the rest of us—that is, the Father & the Son & the Holy Spirit. Amen.