

11TH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR

As harvests grow, as cattle fatten, as sheep produce ever finer wool-clips, the person of Faith sees the Hand of God and gives thanks.

For a townie like myself it is all-too easy to take God's Fatherly care for granted. I turn on the tap and glorious hot water shoots forth. I go to the shops and there is an almost endless variety of meat- all pre-packaged. It is only when things go wrong, when roads flood and cut us off from supplies that I turn to our sustaining, protecting God and ask for help.

In the days of Ezekiel the Jewish people were languishing in slavery in Babylon. They were utterly downtrodden and seemingly doomed as a nation: their temple in ruins, their countryside occupied by foreigners. They understood that only a direct intervention from God could save them. And so they turned to God. They prayed as never before. God replied through Ezekiel, the Prophet. God told them to be of good hope. In a few years' time the political order would change and they would be able to return to Jerusalem once again. Like a vibrant shoot they would be replanted on Mt. Sion. And that they would grow luxuriantly and become a noble and respected nation once again.

People from all the nations of the earth would journey to Jerusalem to learn the truths of God from them. And then in the days of the Messiah, the Kingdom of God would spread from Jerusalem to embrace the whole world.

The Church is the fulfilment of this prophecy. And we rejoice in this. In our days the Church, the New Israel, is under all sorts of attack. We are becoming more and more aware of how dependent we are on God's grace if we are to continue being the leaven bringing God's Kingdom to all people.

Our Readings invite us to be calm, patient and hopeful even as we gaze on the apparent rejection of Christianity by so many. We are to be people of hope; knowing that God is always active; and continually inspiring people of good will to bring about the Kingdom.

So many of Jesus' parables exhort us to roll up our sleeves and get active in this work. Today's parables balance this by reminding us not to be discouraged when things don't happen immediately because God's Spirit works quietly. Often time is needed. Great patience is needed.

Many of us need to be reminded that violent efforts to coerce immediate spiritual growth in family members are futile. We cannot make a lettuce grow more quickly by whacking it with a spade. What we can do is to water it, weed around it and fertilise it.

With our children, our spouses, relations and friends the best we can do is to give a positive witness of the Faith to them by loving them generously. We have to be very patient.

At Colleen Mazengarb's funeral yesterday I met a gentleman who told me that all of his life he had been distant from God. He had been a non-believer.

But at a family gathering three years ago he met Colleen for the first time and took the opportunity to speak to her of the spiritual void he was living in. Colleen spoke to him of the joy her Faith gave her. The gentleman told me that something began burning in his heart as she spoke. The following Sunday he, very diffidently, came to Mass. Now he is very much at home in the Parish, has a good relationship with the Lord and is ever so much more at peace within himself.

He made the long journey to be at Colleen's Funeral in gratitude for the role she played- probably unknowingly- in bringing him to God.

I know Colleen would have taken no credit. And she would be right. The man's coming to Faith was primarily God's work. But Colleen's holiness was the fertiliser God used to help the seed of that man's Faith take root.

Planted in the hearts of all people is a seed yearning for perfect love; yearning for utter intimacy with a perfect lover. Only God can satisfy this longing. For some it is the task of a life-time to come to this knowledge.

We all pray, I'm sure, for a spark of grace to inflame the hearts of our loved ones with a love for the Lord. The wait may seem endless. It is like waiting for winter to end. But experience reminds us that just when winter seems to be at its coldest, daffodils suddenly appear and kowhais begin to flower. We must be patient. We must keep watering the souls of our loved ones with prayer and keep fertilising their hearts with acts of penance.

And be of good hope. When God's warming Sun finally comes, the growth will be dramatic.