

For Sunday, June 10, 2018

Growing the Kingdom

10th Sunday in Ordinary Time

<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/061018.cfm>

Genesis 3:9-15

2 Corinthians 4:13—5:1

Mark 3:20-35

I have a tendency to psych myself out over things. I can get overwhelmed running through various scenarios of outcomes or responses in my mind, which can oftentimes keep me up at night. Sometimes, I try to control people or circumstances in order that my plan comes about. But it never works out the way I had hoped.

I think the same is true with the kingdom of God.

I grew up in the era of the “new evangelization” and witnessed a whole crop of new initiatives and programs aimed at engaging the culture for Christ. In my naiveté, I was enamored by the idealism of the Gospel and didn’t take into account very well whose Kingdom I was representing.

I love what [St. John Paul II](#) said, “The kingdom will grow insofar as every person learns to turn to God in the intimacy of prayer as to a Father, and strives to do His will.” ([RM, 13](#)). This was a key insight that I didn’t know when I was younger. I hadn’t yet understood my dignity as a son of the Father, so I didn’t know how to do what was asked of me, nor was I able to share His heart in those things.

St. John Paul continues, “This kingdom aims at transforming human relationships; it grows gradually as people slowly learn to love, forgive and serve one another.” ([RM, 15](#)) This is a second key insight: Where is this kingdom located? In relationships. I love traveling and visiting churches wherever I go, and I have become keenly aware of the vitality of a parish. In my observations, it has nothing to do with the exquisiteness nor contemporaneity of the architecture. I have been to liturgies in beautiful cathedrals that were spiritually cold and empty. I have been to liturgies in standing-room-only gyms and halls, where I was overwhelmed by the spiritual vitality of the community.

Building the kingdom that is intentionally focused on restoring relationships is much more difficult than creating innovative and relevant programs because programs require less heart energy than relationships. Programs live in controlled environments with predictable outcomes; relationships are not predictable (any married person already knows this!). Programs grow through mile markers of success; relationships grow through the complexity of honest conversations. Programs can impact lives; relationships add value to lives. Programs have structure; relationships need only availability. Programs analyze data and generate statistics to gauge success; relationships measure the number of hours making memories together. Programs tend to have a limited shelf life; relationships can grow despite limitations of time and location. And programs can have a financial investment; relationships always require a sacrificial investment.



When I build my kingdom for God with my gifts and talents, I measure growth by human standards. When I help God build His kingdom with the tools He has given to me, I measure growth by His standards, which are not measurable with my tools.

After I planted [my garden](#), I was away from the Hermitage for a couple of weeks. When I came back, I was amazed to see how my garden had grown while I was away. The bleeding hearts were peculiarly fascinating! I had started the garden with loads of mulch, compost, and lots of water, and nature took over in my absence. So it is with the kingdom of God. It grows without needing control or manipulation, provided that I've done my part.

Today, I find myself less anxious and less controlling. But I still have a long way to go in situations or relationships for which I am responsible. However, I notice that the outcomes have been consistently better than I would have imagined or planned myself. For these, it is indeed good to give thanks to the Lord for His kindness and faithfulness to me. (cf Ps 92: 2-3).

Br. John Marmion Villa, M. Div.

PRAYER

Give us, oh Lord,
Eyes for seeing,
A heart for loving,
Breath for living.
Lord, I need your eyes.
Give me a living faith.
I need your heart,
A love to withstand any test.
I need the breath of God,
Give your hope to me and all your Church,
That the Church today bear witness to the world,
That the world may know all Christians
By their look of joy and serenity,
A warm and generous heart
And the unfailing optimism
That rises from that secret, everlasting spring
Of joyful hope.
— excerpt from a *Prayer of Hope* by Cardinal Leo Suenens

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