

My beloved brothers and sisters, all of us can remember as a child, probably in Kindergarten or 1st Grade, the wonder of taking a bean or other seed, wrapping it in a damp piece of paper, and opening it a few days later with awe, discovering that it had sprouted. There is still great mystery involved in the sprouting of a seed, seemingly dead and dried out, into something totally unlike what was planted in the ground. This is the image that Jesus uses to teach us about the mystery of God's Kingdom.

The Gospel phrase: "The Kingdom of God is like...", is often misunderstood. It is ancient Rabbinical language using a simile, a comparison of something known to something unknown; in this case, the common experience of planting seeds, and the Rule of God over the world. A better translation of the phrase would be: "The Rule of God is like..." In both cases, the seed has been scattered and sown and grows into something extraordinary. In both cases, the seed is God's work and His Divine Word, which when fully grown, will exhibit a Divine Power that produces more than any human endeavor could ever hope to realize! This is true in time and history, and it is true in our own lives! It was true in the life of our Holy Father St. Anthony of Lisboa or of Padua, if you insist!

Another aspect of the story is that the mustard plant's seed is as small as a speck on a piece of paper, and from that speck of a seed grows a plant that often reaches 8' or more, in which the birds of the air can truly nest, in which they find safety and a home! Even the idea of the birds of the air is a reference to the nations of the world- the Reign of God is not limited to just Israel, it is meant for all peoples and languages and cultures throughout time!

Thus, the kingdom of God is not just about heaven, the reward for the faithful and just; rather, it is about the reign of God in our lives and in our hearts, which brings us into the peace and joy of that Kingdom, now, and which is the only power on this earth that can bring the world the justice and peace it seeks. It begins by allowing God to reign in our hearts through prayer especially the Rosary which is so dear to the hearts of Jesus and Mary, the Eucharist and Confession, and the rightful relationship with God and His people, our neighbor in love and service!

The saints are the powerful example of what God will do in us and through us if we allow Him to reign in us! St. Anthony began by training as a knight, and was a

worldly soul, who sought God after he severely wounded another man. He studied for priesthood, and heard the call of God to a deeper holiness through St. Francis of Assisi. St. Anthony became a force for the conversion of Europe and the Church along with St. Francis. They literally changed the direction of the world and the Church. He is one of the major teachers of the Church and a Doctor of the Church.

Today, we celebrate this man who allowed God to reign over the whole of his life, and God made him one of the greatest of our saints. God can do the same thing in us, if we allow the seed of His Living, Divine Word, to grow and flourish in our lives as well.

Today, I am also giving great thanks to God for this family of St. Anthony's parish which He entrusted to me, almost twenty years ago. I love you all, more than you can know. I will treasure all of you in my heart. Please forgive me if I have failed to be the holy and good priest that God calls me to be, and please pray for me that as I go forward, I too will allow God to reign over the whole of the rest of my life and become the saintly man He created me to be!