

14 June

Today's readings are full of agricultural images which we find so often in the scriptures. In today's first reading from the prophet Ezekiel, God promises that he will plant a shoot high on the mountain of Israel. It will sprout branches, bear fruit and become a noble cedar. Every bird and every winged creature will live there and find shade. This reading, like Genesis, speaks to us about the order and dignity of creation, that all of creation is in right relationship with God, that the created order is good because it is blessed by God and made by him.

In today's Gospel, Jesus speaks of the kingdom of God in agricultural terms. A man throws seed on the ground. Night and day, while he sleeps, the seed comes to life and grows until harvest time. Just like the seasons, God is at work within us, within the Church and in the world, bringing to life the seeds of his kingdom, bringing to life within each of us the seed of faith, the seed of his kingdom, the seeds of justice, harmony, unity and peace for our world; the seeds of creation and humanity being in right relationship with each other and with God. For Jesus, the principal seed is his word of faith that brings about the kingdom of God, that kingdom of justice, love and peace.

Talking about agricultural images, it is expected in the next week or so that Pope Francis will release a new encyclical letter on the theme of creation. The title of the encyclical is taken from the Canticle of Creation of St Francis of Assisi (*Laudato Sii Signore*), 'Praise be you my Lord for all your creatures'. It builds on the international concern in recent decades in terms of caring for the environment and not exploiting creation. But I think that it also builds on a key theme that is very personal for Pope Francis; living a life of simplicity like Pope Francis, removing the useless things that clutter our lives and that we waste money on especially in the western world – clothes that we don't wear, books that we don't read, electronic devices that we tire of very quickly, DVDs that we don't watch, food that we throw away. Pope Francis wants to be generous with our resources and not accumulate personal wealth that turns into idolatry. I have no doubt that the encyclical will 'hammer home' the message of not exploiting the resources of the planet solely for wealth and personal gratification. He will remind us of the social implications and global responsibilities in caring for creation.

His great mentor, of course, is the great St Francis of Assisi. This great saint came from a wealthy family and was known for his wild living. St Francis of Assisi heard the call of the Lord to forsake all power and riches and to give his life completely in the service of Jesus and the Gospel. His complete dedication to poverty was seen in his simplicity of life and seeing the hand of God at work in the beauty and splendour of creation. People thought St Francis was mad for giving away a lucrative share of his father's business and, in fact, his father was furious with him. But Francis knew that simplicity of life, prayer, witness, service and caring for creation was the true wealth of his life. And he inspired many others to follow him, to find joy, peace and serenity in the simplicity of life.

We too are called to live the simplicity of life modelled by St Francis. We are called not to exploit the world's resources, to care for creation, to accumulate less and to give more, to share what we have so that the seed of faith planted in our hearts will bring an abundant harvest for the Gospel of Christ. Let us pray that this seed of faith given to us in Baptism, brought to life by God's word and nourished by the great gift of the Eucharist, may be a sign to all the world of God's covenant with creation, a sign of the goodness and kindness of God who gives us new life in Christ.