

HOMILY FOR THE 11TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

The first reading speaks about the top of the Cedar.

Apparently, the top of the tree Cedar is where the new stuff grows. A tree doesn't grow from the bottom up. It extends beyond itself. The top of the tree is usually less coloured than the old tree. The top of the tree is the newest and most vulnerable part. The prophet Ezekiel announced that God would take a shoot from the highest branch, the most vulnerable, and plant it in the most honoured place – the highest mountain of God's People.

It would sprout and bear fruit. It would be a place of rest and comfort. The birds, also one of the most vulnerable creatures in the Scriptures, would find a place of protection and future hope.

No other tree would compare with this tree. Only the one planted by God will survive its vulnerability and be comfort for the vulnerable.

Jesus entered the world in the most vulnerable way. He came as a baby to an ordinary family. His life was nothing spectacular and then, he revealed how God was present in who he is. He is the top of God's tree – the new and vulnerable shoot. We know how the vulnerable – the sinners, the sick, those with disability and, those who were rejected, came to him. He was vulnerable himself. Hence, he suffered and died as the most vulnerable of all people.

This was why the vulnerable come to him. These days, we might also consider the refugees, the indigenous, those struggling with their sexual identity and the poor.

The vulnerable are at the top of his tree.

The second reading is quite short however, it is a conclusion to a long reflection by the Apostle Paul on the vulnerability of the Church. He acknowledged that no-one likes us all that much. In fact, as history will show, when we are popular in the eyes of the world, we are probably the worst version of ourselves.

Paul reflected on how we are earthenware vessels – brittle, fragile. He recalled that Christians are subjected to suffering and death as anyone else. There are no special privileges because we are Christian.

Paul came to the conclusion that he didn't care whether he lived or died but, however, whichever it was to be, everything comes together when there is relationship with Jesus Christ. Paul highlighted just how vulnerable we are yet, God can do wonderful things with us.

In this light, Jesus speaks about seeds. A mustard seed is no bigger than a grain of rice. It becomes a tree which is a little higher than as twice as high as me.

When you consider what comes from a seed – how little and insignificant it is – how does this tiny thing become a tree in which birds find shelter?

The Church is not successful in the way we often think about success. We are quite brittle in the world today. We are usually considered unspectacular. We probably expect that we can offer more to this modern world than we actually can. Whether we live or die, will not matter all that much to many.

However, the Kingdom of God somehow has its home in the Church because, Jesus has his home in us. He is the seed to our faith.

And, seeds take time to grow. Seeds have so many challenges to contend with, whether it be a need for water and nutrients, surviving those who can devour it, growing amidst weeds.

And, this is how Jesus described the Kingdom of God. It is vulnerable for the vulnerable. It is pathetic for the pathetic. It is broken for the broken.

It is meant to be the same as the way that Jesus lived his life. And, as with Jesus, it simply needs people who are faithful and committed to its life, to see what God will do with her.