



The mustard seed is a very small seed and so it makes a good symbol for the beginnings of faith, which at first can seem very small. But it is also an unlikely symbol to choose, as in Jesus' world it was regarded as a terrible pest which had to be kept under control or it would take over the whole vegetable patch. It's a provocative image showing that just a small response in faith could, with God's grace, flourish and become all-pervasive. Most people looked for some greater sign. The prophet Ezekiel had talked of the great cedars on the high mountain which would spread their strong branches for the winged creatures of the earth to gather among. He was speaking to a people who were looking for a miracle.

**OPEN TO GOD'S PRESENCE**

Jesus offers no such spectacle. But he does provide another perspective. God's presence is deep down within all life but we have to be open to that presence or we can pass it by, and so Jesus uses the metaphor of a woman making bread. More specifically, kneading yeast into the dough. Again yeast was regarded as something ritually unclean; no one knew how it had the effect it did and so they were suspicious of it. And it had this strange quality that while it made the bread rise it disappeared in the process. So its effects could be seen, but it could not. This is so true of Jesus' teaching about God. When God comes close, all sorts of things happen but we can't see God, only the fruits of God's presence. Jesus teaches all who will listen how to discern that presence; and that is part of the role of the Church in the world, to point to the signs of God's Spirit in all the unexpected places. And so Pope Francis, too, points to God in the midst of the ordinary.

**Mass text**

**ENTRANCE ANTIPHON**

**See, I have God for my help.  
The Lord sustains my soul.  
I will sacrifice to you with willing heart,  
and praise your name, O Lord, for it is good.**

**FIRST READING** Wisdom 12:13. 16-19

**PSALM** Psalm 85

**RESPONSE** **O Lord, you are good and forgiving.**

1. O Lord, you are good and forgiving, full of love to all who call. Give heed, O Lord, to my prayer and attend to the sound of my voice. **R.**
2. All the nations shall come to adore you and glorify your name, O Lord: for you are great and do marvellous deeds, you who alone are God. **R.**
3. But you, God of mercy and compassion, slow to anger, O Lord, abounding in love and truth, turn and take pity on me. **R.**

**SECOND READING** Romans 8:26-27

**GOSPEL ACCLAMATION**  
**Alleluia, alleluia!**  
**Blessed are you, Father,  
Lord of heaven and earth,  
for revealing the mysteries of the kingdom  
to mere children.**  
**Alleluia!**

**GOSPEL** Matthew 13:24-43

**COMMUNION ANTIPHON**  
**The Lord, the gracious, the merciful,  
has made a memorial of his wonders;  
he gives food to those who fear him.**

**Next Sunday's Readings:**  
1 Kings 3:5. 7-12  
Romans 8:28-30  
Matthew 13:44-52



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**WEEDS, BIRDS AND MUSTARD SEEDS**



Jesus is walking in and out of farming villages that never appeared on any map. And so, talking of the spreading of God's holy rule and the Good News of God's mercy coming close, and the gifts of faith and the challenges of discipleship, he uses examples from the everyday experience of his audience.

I wonder if there were already problems emerging in Matthew's community? He puts a lot of emphasis on Jesus' teaching about such situations; much more so than Mark and Luke. So what do you do if there are people in the community whose life is undermining the simplicity and purity of the Gospel message? Elsewhere Matthew has advice about challenging them and offering multiple opportunities for reconciliation but here he keeps it simple. There will always be those whose lives are not simple and transparent, who say one thing and mean or do another. But Jesus' advice uses the wisdom of the farmer. If you dig up all the weeds as they appear in a wheat field you will inevitably destroy good wheat. Much better to let them grow to harvest and only then separate the still usable wheat from the weeds.

We can imagine this would have provoked quite a discussion. It might still do so for us. In every age we have members of our Church who seem to know all too well who are the wheat and who the weeds, and are very ready to excommunicate the weeds. If you go onto a number of international Catholic blogs you will find some that accuse Pope Francis of being heretical because he responded to the realities and difficulties of married people, expressed in the Synods on the Family in 2014 and 2015, with the encouraging text *Amoris Laetitia*, where all those in our family of faith – the happily married, the separated, the divorced, the remarried – are treated with compassion and patient care. Pope Francis was not intending to introduce new teaching; but to continue the practice of his teacher, Jesus.

**Catching the kingdom**



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19 JULY 2020

16TH SUNDAY  
IN ORDINARY TIME

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DIVINE OFFICE WEEK IV