

On Sundays, the first reading from the Old Testament is always thematically linked to the gospel – as is the case today – but the second reading, usually from St Paul, doesn't generally reflect the gospel in this way. This Sunday's readings are different because they are all the same – if I can put it like that; they all have the same theme. The first reading from the prophet Isaiah is about seed and sowing; so is the responsorial psalm and the gospel. The second reading from St Paul's letter to the Romans, *appears* not to be connected, but if we look closer we can see that it actually is; because he writes about creation groaning in a great act of giving birth – and what is the sprouting of a seed but a giving birth to the shoot, the bloom and the fruit? A seed in the soil grows and pushes upward into the light and eventually gives birth to itself as the plant. So all the readings today are about birth-giving as growing and blossoming into new life.

Importantly, this process takes place below ground, deep in the earth, in darkness, hidden and unseen. Many of Jesus' parables refer to the kingdom of God in this way: he uses the metaphors of treasure buried in a field, seeds sown in the soil, a pearl waiting to be found. In Jesus' teaching, the kingdom is never 'out there' – it is always 'in here', within, in the soul and psyche of each one of us. He also told us that when someone comes along and says: 'Look, the kingdom is there!' or 'Here is the kingdom!' we are not to believe them. He tells us that the kingdom of God is within us.

One of the most endangered species on our planet today, the musk deer is known for producing the most expensive scent in the world, also known as Kasturi in Ayurveda. The scent is produced in a small pouch known as a musk pod, which is what makes it extremely valuable in the eyes of commerce. The deer is so enchanted by this fragrance, it often roams for miles to discover the source of it, not realising that the source is itself.

The truth is, the kingdom is nowhere else but in ourselves; we look outward and around, seeking something that we already possess... but we do not recognise it. The kingdom is not a goal to be achieved, the end of a journey to be reached; we don't have to travel anywhere to find it and it isn't a special state of perfection reserved for the elite few; it doesn't involve turning away from our life in the world or 'detaching' ourselves from earthly things. It is already within, entire and whole, and we need its truth to *live* life in the world, not escape from it.

In the earth of our soul, in the darkness of our psyche, the seed of the kingdom grows until we 'give birth' to it within us. This inner birthing process was known to all the mystics:

Meister Eckhart said: "God the Father never ceases to bear his Son in all eternity... but what good is that if it does not take place in me?"

Angelus Silesius wrote: "Unless I receive the angel's greeting and become pregnant, as Mary did, with God, nothing avails me."

And this inner birth in the earth of our soul is not some private, narcissistic affair, for if what is within is authentic, it will inevitably seek outward form. I don't think we should imagine that the kingdom of God will ever be established in this world or this life – it is too wounded, too fragmented for that – and I don't think it is ever meant to be. Nevertheless, its radiance can shine amidst the world's shadows if enough individuals seek it and give birth to it within themselves. The kingdom of God is contagious and spreads. Jesus said:

“The Kingdom of Heaven is like the yeast a woman used in making bread. Even though she put only a little yeast in three measures of flour, it leavened every part of the dough.”

And the kingdom that we birth within ourselves is not a morality, not a spirituality nor a commitment to peace and justice – although these things will inevitably flow from it – it is actually a vision, a way of understanding and encountering ourselves and others: a vision of the indestructible oneness of all life. We begin to realise that we are more one than many, more united than separate; ultimately we understand that we are not many or separate at all. This vision belongs to love. We need to infect the world with it because the world is dying without it. It doesn't matter what language we use or what faith we belong to – all creeds and statements of faith and dogmatic formulae point to the same truth, but they can do no more than point. To give birth to the kingdom-vision and live our daily life in its light, is to teach by example that if we open our hearts to the simple fact of our existence,

embracing both the pain and the joy, the bliss and the sorrow, the certainty and the doubt, we will come to know that none of us is ever separate from the undivided Whole, none of us ever broken, ever lost.