

Eleventh Sunday of Ordinary Time June 17, 2012

One of the great characters in literature is a young man named Pip from "Great Expectations," by Charles Dickens. An orphan raised by a cruel aunt and kind uncle, he receives an inheritance from an unknown person. This money will help him to educate himself into becoming a gentleman of culture and good taste. He assumes his benefactor is a wealthy old woman he meets as a child but his assumptions are shattered when he learns the true identity of his benefactor: a convict he encountered in a graveyard while visiting his mother's grave. Pip brought this convict much needed food and the convict became his mysterious benefactor. This person is hidden in mystery throughout the story and his identity cause Pip's expectations to be completely overturned.

God's Presence is largely a hidden mystery that surfaces in ways that overturn our own expectations as to who God is and how he chooses to love. God's presence is like a seed in the dark earth, hidden, waiting to rise to the surface and take root in our lives. He plants himself, and his Word, Jesus, in the soil of our hearts, and his growing Presence is mostly undetected by our ordinary awareness.

Each time we "tap into" this presence...each time this mysterious Presence is gently made known, the Kingdom comes alive and we come alive. Each parable, including the two in the gospel, is meant to transform and deepen how we see our lives and the ground of our beings we call God. Each parable takes us deeper into the hidden mystery of God.

The growth is very subtle and only made apparent when we look back on our lives and see our relation with the Lord growing larger and larger, like the shrub from the tiniest mustard seed.

And we grow not for ourselves, but to provide a place for others: the poor, the lonely, the outcast, the sick; we give them a place of refuge and shade from the heat of fear and alienation. The Kingdom of Jesus, which is at the heart of every parable, is not a place but a person, Christ, himself, who lives in every human heart: the kingdom of God is within each and every human being.

We think we have God pegged, like Pip thinking he knew the identity of his generous benefactor. But when God's mysterious and hidden presence shoots through our awareness, like a sprout shooting forth from the soil, our rootedness in God grows. Part of growing in the spiritual life is nurturing this hidden Presence through prayer, the Eucharist, penance, outreach to people in need, community support and engagement. After this comes trust... trust that God is alive in our hearts; trust that we are making progress in our lives of prayer even when it doesn't feel like it; trust that the Kingdom is taking root.

Once Pip learned how wrong he was, his heart was transformed and he realized how snobbish and condescending he had become. His "great expectations" had been overturned and he became a human being for others. That's living in the Kingdom.