

MONDAY OF THE THIRTY-SECOND WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

Offered by Mary Ellen Sheehan, IHM
 IHM Chapel, Monroe, MI 08 Nov 2021
 Texts: Wisdom: 1:1-7; Luke 17:1-6

In our readings today, the church presents us with two themes: *justice* and *faith*. In Luke's gospel, Jesus has made his turn from Galilee toward Jerusalem. He intensifies instruction for his followers about faith – which they are going to need for sure when they are in Jerusalem - with a familiar analogy: the mustard seed and the mulberry tree. Not knowing too much about the mulberry tree, I “googled” it!

I discovered that the mulberry tree is fruit-bearing, grows to be about 10 yards tall, has a life-span of about 75 years, and exists in warmer climates. I got even more curious, and so I checked out the famous sequoia trees of Northern California in our country. I found out that its seed is about the size of a tomato seed and hundreds of them are in one of the thousands of cones that drops to the ground from the tree. The largest Sequoia tree is in California and it is almost the size of a football field – about 90 yards. The oldest one is there, too, and it was seeded about 3200 years ago. Wow! That was even before any of the oral traditions that coalesced later into the written Hebrew bible even existed!

Interestingly, there is also a sequoia tree in Manistee, Michigan. It was planted 77 years ago by a couple who had travelled to northern California. They brought back six seedlings of the tree to plant in Manistee, three of which produced trees. The largest of the three is now about 35 yards high.

After listening to Jesus about forgiveness, the disciples say to him: Increase our faith! Notice, though, that Jesus does not do so automatically; rather he responds with an enticing IF. IF you have faith the size of a seed, you could move a mulberry tree to be planted in the sea and it would do so! I am wondering if today we need faith the size of a sequoia tree to engage all the issues of our day in our global earth village and our church: climate change, white privilege, voting rights, LGBTQX rights, poverty, migration, sex trade of minors, divisions in our church about interpreting the Second Vatican Council and about the leadership of Francis, the Bishop of Rome.

The reading from Wisdom, though, helps us. It reveals that faith and justice are related: *Love* justice, you who judge the earth; *think* of God in goodness; and *seek* God with sincerity of heart ...” Or as Jesuit poet Gerard Manley Hopkins describes it in his letters and notes and poems, it is not so much that we are individual egos or *selves* – but more that we are *selving*, always in the act of releasing our tendencies toward sin and becoming ever more *God-love* by *justicing*. To cite a part of one of his poems, slightly edited:

“...I say more: the just (person) *justices*;
 Keeps grace; that keeps all his (and her) goings graces;
 Acts in God's eye what in God's eye, she and he is --
 Christ -- for Christ plays in ten thousand places,

Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his
To the Father through the features of (peoples') faces.

"As kingfishers catch fire" in Robert Bridges, ed.
The Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins. 1918.

So, let's keep at it; let's keep *justicing* in and from Christ. *Faithing* and *justicing* are enjambed; they are linked. There is not one without the other, and all this grounded in the Wisdom of Christ, the Love of Christ, already in us!