

## Mark 4:26-34

In today's Gospel Jesus uses two parables to explain to us what our involvement is when it comes to building the Kingdom of God.

In the first parable Jesus says: "The Kingdom of God is as if a man would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, without his knowing how".

In the second parable Jesus compares the kingdom of God with the mustard seed which "...is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown, it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs..." Here again, man doesn't don't know "how" the tiny mustard seed grows.

Fr Scott Lewis is a scripture scholar. He explains that these parables teach us that we should not presume we know how to "build the kingdom of God". His point is that just like the man who doesn't know "how" the seed grows, we don't know how to build the kingdom of God - "only God builds God's Kingdom".

This is an very important point, because as Father Lewis also warns us:

"When we delude ourselves into thinking that we are the builders, our efforts are usually tainted with a fair amount of self-seeking, fear and what can only be called less than holy opinions and ideas. Some of our greatest failures and atrocious disasters have occurred when Christians thought they were doing God a big favour. The Crusades, the [Spanish] Inquisition, and the conquest and forced conversion of [Indigenous] peoples are just some of the more prominent examples."

We should think about his warning as we struggle with the tragic discovery of 215 unmarked gravesites of children at the former residential school in Kamloops, B.C. This discovery is a stark reminder of the continuing harm being inflicted on Indigenous people by a residential school system that was conceived and operated by people who deluded themselves into thinking they were “the builders”.

In his letter to Catholics last weekend Cardinal Collins described such deluded “builders” in this way:

“We must ...recognize the betrayal of trust by many Catholic leaders who were responsible for operating residential schools, abandoning their obligation to care for young and innocent children...”

Cardinal Collins refers to the apologies church leaders have made for this betrayal, both historically and more recently, but he makes it clear that:

“These actions do not erase our history; they acknowledge our past, force us to face the consequences of our behaviour and compel us to ensure that our sins are not repeated.”

He then tells us we have to do more than offer apologies:

“We all seek the truth and this tragic discovery provides yet another opportunity for us to learn more about this dark chapter in our history and the painful journey experienced by so many of our Indigenous brothers and sisters.”

Today is an opportunity to learn more about this dark chapter. I want to share with you a little background on residential schools, so you'll have a

better understanding of what happened, and why it's important that we do more than apologize.

The Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada tells us that “[f]or over a century, the central goals of Canada’s Aboriginal policy were to ...cause Aboriginal peoples to cease to exist as distinct legal, social, cultural, religious, and racial entities in Canada.”

A key element of this policy was the residential school system. When Prime Minister Sir John A. Macdonald introduced the legislation for these schools in May 1883, he told the House of Commons that the schools were necessary in order “to take the Indian out of the child”, He also said this:

When the school is on the reserve the child lives with its parents, who are savages; he is surrounded by savages, and though he may learn to read and write, his habits, and training and mode of thought are Indian. He is simply a savage who can read and write....Indian children should be withdrawn as much as possible from the parental influence, and the only way to do that would be to put them in central training industrial schools where they will acquire the habits and modes of thought of white men.

Over 150,00 children, starting as young as four years old, were often suddenly and violently separated from their parents by the police and other agents who were given arbitrary power to take the children to one of the 139 residential schools. They were also given the power to fine or imprison parents who attempted to stop them from doing so.

The children were often kept at the schools for ten months each year, from September to June, and usually no contact with their families was allowed.

Indigenous communities were eerily quiet without the sound of children's voices.

Conditions in many residential schools were appalling. Canada's assimilation policies, combined with unregulated and unsupervised operational practices created a system where severe abuse - physical, sexual, psychological and spiritual - could and did take place.

The residential school system impacted nearly seven consecutive generations of Indigenous children who were stripped of their identity, including their names and everything they knew about their culture, language and traditions. Thousands of children did not survive their ordeal. We've seen devastating proof of that in Kamloops.

Those who did survive were traumatized by the abuses they endured, leaving lasting scars on Indigenous communities and a legacy of dysfunction that has affected their lives and the lives of their children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren to this day.

I have seen first-hand the terrible and tragic consequences of Canada's treatment of Indigenous people in the residential school system.

My family on my father's side is Sto:lo from the Fraser River Valley in BC.

My grandmother was a residential school survivor. She had six brothers and sisters all of whom were residential school survivors. Many of their children are also residential school survivors. Some attended the

Kamloops school. Many were abused and harmed in those schools. They and their children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren are still struggling with the lasting damage caused by that dark period.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission describes the establishment and operation of the residential schools as cultural genocide, and rightly so. The schools were created to forcibly separate Indigenous children from their families, to destroy their cultural and spiritual ties, and to assimilate them into the “white” culture.

This inexcusable treatment of Indigenous people fractured the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada. That is why reconciliation is necessary. Reconciliation is about healing this fractured relationship. It is about establishing and maintaining mutually respectful relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. On Thursday the Bishops of Canada released a statement in which they “pledged true and deep commitment to renewing and strengthening relationships with Indigenous people across the land.”

In today’s second reading Paul reminds us that:

“We walk by faith...[because] all of us must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may receive recompense for what he or she has done....., whether good or evil”.

In the words of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, our fundamental obligation is “to do more than just talk about reconciliation; we must learn how to practise reconciliation in our everyday lives”.

So, as you “walk by faith” in the days ahead, listen with sincerity to Indigenous people, learn about the painful journey they have had to suffer, and genuinely endeavour to establish mutually respectful relationships with them.

If you do this, then when you appear before the judgment seat of Christ, he will know you have done something good in your life.