

I am sure most of you are familiar with the story of Rosa Parks, an African American woman living in Alabama, then a racially segregated state. She was travelling home from work on the bus one evening in 1955, as she did every day. She was asked to give up her seat so that a white man could sit down. She refused, not because she was in some revolutionary state of mind but because she was tired and her feet ached, and she complained about why she should have to get up anyway. The police were called, Rosa was arrested and was later fined \$10 in court for 'violating a local ordinance.'

Her little spark of dissent started a fire. Word quickly spread. A meeting was called, and a local clergyman called Martin Luther King was asked to address it. Long story short: the black people boycotted the bus service for more than a year during which time the leaders of the protest were arrested, and Dr King's home was firebombed. But on 13th November 1956 the Supreme Court of the United States declared Alabama's segregation laws to be unconstitutional. The bus boycott was ended the following month. It was not long before segregation was banned in all public facilities across America. The march to full civil rights had begun although events in recent years would suggest that the finishing line has still to be crossed. However, in due course Rosa Parks was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom and various other honours. Streets and other public places in America and beyond have been named after her, including a station on the Paris Metro.

It all began with one small act. As the proverb says, 'a journey of a thousand miles begins with one step.' Small beginnings can lead to great things. In today's Gospel, Jesus speaks of God's kingdom as like a mustard seed planted in the earth. Even though it is tiny, the smallest of seeds, given time it will grow into the biggest shrub in the garden.

If we want to change something in our lives or in the world, we have to start somewhere. That beginning will be necessarily very small and may appear to be totally insignificant or even apparently useless. But it may well lead to something great, like seeds that eventually grow to produce a rich harvest. That is certainly true in the spiritual life, the life of faith.

We do well to ask ourselves how far we have progressed since that first seed of faith was planted in us. What kind of fruit are we producing in our Christian

lives? Have we become more loving, more compassionate, and consequently more disgusted with the injustices and divisions and prejudices in the world and among those we relate to? Have we allowed God to enable us to grow spiritually, so that we give quality time to God through prayer and our community worship, which are such a priority in the Christian life and without which we can do nothing? Are we 'walking the talk,' that is, is our faith life about practice rather than just theory? As human beings with free choice we have always to cooperate, to let God in to help us move forward, even though we do not always know where the moving forward will lead.

At the heart of Christian prayer, in the Lord's own prayer, we pray for God's kingdom to come on earth as it is in heaven. That kingdom on earth means a society, a world, of justice, love and peace in the fullest sense. Each one of us has a part to play in creating this world in cooperation with God. As individuals we may feel that we have little to contribute. Yet to plant even one seed of faith or hope, or help or encouragement, or friendship or forgiveness, or any act which assists someone's wellbeing, is a very worthwhile and Spirit-driven action which may become life-changing for that person or people. And also life-enhancing for us when we plant such seeds.

We can then leave it to God to bring forth the full fruit, the harvest, from our seed planting. Jesus began his great work in very humble, local ways, telling stories to people, caring for them, assuring them of God's love for them, bringing them peace and healing, and calling a handful of not very bright fishermen to work with him. And great things followed. Mother Theresa once said, 'We can do no great things – but we can do small things with great love.' Such love can change someone's life. It could also change the world.