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Mustard

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Mustard -- Matthew 13:31

My sister turned 58 last week. She said she had visited my blog to see if I had written something about her. She is my only sister. There are seven of us, all boys except Mary Ann, the last to arrive and survive in a steady succession of pregnancies that was my father's pride and joy but, as we know now, wore our mother to a frazzle from 1942 until 1952. Our father was very Irish, married at age 36 after taking care of his mother, and he was in a hurry to have a big family, actually a baseball team, he said. My sister would have been in right field, but the whole idea fell apart when my mother miscarried number eight and my dad realized that seven was plenty and that having a daughter was better than a sports metaphor.

My sister and her husband, Chris, have been married for 35 years (I'm guessing based on the age of their oldest daughter Sarah, who gave them their first grandchild in 2008). They have five children, enough for a basketball team or hockey team without the goalie. They live in Minnesota. They raised their children on classical music and good books -- no TV -- and the results have been excellent so far.

I can tie all this into today's Gospel about the parable of the mustard seed. They chose this gospel reading for their wedding, casting its imagery like seeds into their own future, promising to be a couple who practiced hospitality, trusted that God would take their small efforts and multiply them many times over. It has all happened. They have always lived simply, their long wooden table welcoming everyone who stopped by. Birds of every kind have sheltered in the shade of the branches of their family tree. Mustard is a great seasoning on hot dogs and bratwurst, served with cole slaw and an icy Schell's beer on a hot day.

If you happen to be passing through New Ulm, Minn., stop by, tell them Pat sent you. Happy birthday, Mary. What are brothers for?

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