



### **SUNDAY REFLECTION**

What is the Kingdom of God? How does it come about? And how will it grow?

These are some of the questions addressed in the parables of Jesus, including the seven parables found in Matthew 13. As we saw last week, these parables are not simply stories with a moral, nor are they theological tracts or even pithy catechetical lessons. Parables are not, writes Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis in *Fire of Mercy, Heart of the World* (Ignatius Press, 2003), “a test of human intelligence that functions like riddles. Rather they are verbal strategies of grace that test the willingness of the human heart to surrender to, and be enfolded by, the always surprising generosity of Wisdom.”

Leiva-Merikakis describes a parable, strikingly, as “a coded letter left by a Lover” (p 192). He points out that the original Greek renditions of the parables are imbued with a beautiful musicality, adding even more meaning to Jesus’ exhortation: “He who has ears, let him hear” (Mt 13:9). God’s love for mankind is such that the eternal Word uses words of beauty to redeem our souls and transform our hearts.

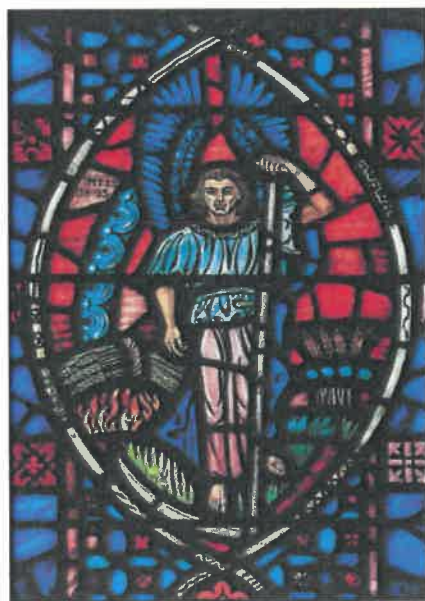
Today's Gospel reading contains three of the seven parables: the parables of the weeds among the wheat, the mustard seed, and the yeast (or leaven). Like the parable of the sower and seeds heard last week, all three express something about the growth of the Kingdom and how God's word brings about that mysterious—and often unseen—growth.

Like the parable of the sower and the seeds, the parable of the weeds among the wheat has an agricultural setting. However, the parable is unique to Matthew's Gospel and does not appear in the other Gospels. The focus is less on the response of the soil to the sower's seeds and more on the mystery of evil and how it grows alongside what the Son of Man has planted in the field of the world. In his explanation of the parable to the disciples, Jesus draws a stark contrast between the children of the kingdom and the children of the evil one. Those who hear the word of God and reject it are the children of Satan. Having been offered light, they choose darkness (cf. Jn 1:9-11; 3:19-20).

But, as Saint Augustine noted, what is currently wheat can become a weed, and what is a weed can still become wheat "and no one knows what they will be tomorrow." It is right to lament the sins committed by sons and daughters of the Church. But we shouldn't be blind to our own weaknesses, nor to the ravenous appetite of the devil, who "is prowling around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (1 Pet 5:8). Mindful of our failings, as the Apostle Paul exhorts the Romans in today's epistle, we must trust in the Holy Spirit, who "comes to the aid of our weakness, for we do not know how to pray as we ought."

The parable of the mustard seed, although short, is memorable in its imagery, especially in the comparison between the largeness of the bush (growing to ten feet in height) and the smallness of the seed. Its central meaning is that the works of God often begin in small ways and are usually ignored or missed by the world. The temptation for the children of the Kingdom is to become impatient, forgetting that this tree has now been growing for thousands of years, and will continue to grow until the end of time.

Even shorter is the parable of the yeast, or leaven. From what seems to be of little consequence comes a super abundance, a theme echoing the reality of the Incarnation and the stunning truth of the empty tomb. It is Christ, the lover of mankind, who is the leaven. And it is through his death and Resurrection and by his Body and Blood that we are leavened—transformed and transferred into the always growing kingdom of the Son (Col 1:13).



**STEWARDSHIP:** “Those who are just must be kind,” says today’s first reading. If our words and deeds are kind and selfless, we will be like the good seed in the Gospel parable and gathered as wheat in the Lord’s harvest.

Good stewards in a parish are like the yeast in today’s Gospel. Their selfless gifts of time and talent help the parish grow and thrive, and their example inspires others to become good stewards too.

### **ADJUSTMENTS IN SCHEDULING AND SEATING FOR WEEKEND MASS**

**Beginning next weekend, 25 -26 July, three public Masses will be celebrated:**

**Saturday 5:00 p.m.**

**This Mass will also be live-streamed as has been previous practice**

**Sunday 8:30 a.m. and 11:30 a.m.**

**You will also notice a change in the seating in the church. In effect it has been reduced. While the original plan met the guidelines of the Governor’s mandate and that of the Diocese and was approved by the appropriate office at the diocesan level; and while with the 3<sup>rd</sup> phase of opening guidelines other parishes are increasing their numbers of participants in order to provide a safety margin we are cutting back to 160 maximum seating. Of course, although the sign-ups usually indicate a full house we have never achieved that with many individuals not showing up for the Mass they registered for.**

**By adding the third Mass on the weekends I can still provide a total seating for roughly 400 people while maintaining adequate distancing.**

**Another change you will see at the three weekend Masses is that we will be utilizing Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist once again. At this time probably two at each Mass.**

**The weekday Mass schedule will remain in its current form**

### **READINGS FOR THE SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY**

**26 JUL ‘20**

**1 Kgs. 3:5, 7-12:** Solomon did not pray for riches or for a long and trouble-free life. Closest to his heart was this: to be a good king to his people.

**Rom. 8:28-30:** Paul reassures us that God is ultimately behind every event that happens in our lives. Christians will become an ever-clearer image of Christ in their own lives, as they share ever more deeply in His risen life.

**Mt. 13:44-52:** The greatest treasure in life is God's friendship. Those who realize this will go to any lengths to possess what they know to be most precious of all

## **SCRIPTURE REFLECTIONS WEEK OF 20 – 25 JULY 2020**

### ***Monday 20 July***

"Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you." He said to them in reply, "An evil and unfaithful generation seeks a sign, but no sign will be given it except the sign of Jonah the prophet."

Mt. 12:38-39

Jonah was the sign. He spent three days and nights in the belly of a whale. He certainly was presumed dead by those who threw him over the side of the boat. But the whale acted as an instrument of God's will in that it brought Jonah to Nineveh to preach repentance. And they did repent and change their lives! The darkness of the belly of the whale, in the end, became a blessing and a sign for ages to come.

Fast forward from the story of Jonah to the story above when the followers of Jesus seek a sign from Him. They want some sort of "proof" of who He is. Or perhaps they are just curious and want to be "entertained" by a miracle. Whatever the case may be, Jesus makes it clear that the sign He will give is the sign of Jonah.

Clearly, the story of Jonah is a prefiguration of the death of Jesus; His three days in the tomb and His Resurrection. This is the sign that Jesus will offer and the sign that He continues to offer. It's a sign of great hope when we perceive it properly.

However, very often we can fall into the same temptation as the followers of Jesus in the story above. Very often we also want a sign other than the signs Jesus gave us. We want some other proof from God of His will. We want Him to speak loudly and clearly. But that doesn't always happen. More often what we experience is what appears to be silence from God. We may wonder, "Lord, where are You? Why don't You speak to me?" But Jesus will speak to us in the same way. He will gently remind us of His life, death and Resurrection. He will remind us that we must believe in all that He has spoken, and even if we feel like we are in the belly of a whale or dead in a tomb, hope is not lost. God is present in all things and He is active and present to us even when He seems to be silent.

Reflect, today, upon how strong your faith is even though you may not get the sign from Heaven that you may want. You must be reminded that the Father spoke to you clearly through the life, death and Resurrection of Jesus and this is the way He continues to speak to you today. Listen to that lesson and embrace the truths it proclaims. Even if you feel like you are in a tomb or God is silent, know He is not. He is speaking to you all the time. You just need to discern His voice.

*Lord, help me to believe in You even though I do not see miracles or signs from Heaven. Help me to believe in You despite any doubts or weaknesses I have in life. Give me a firm faith to answer Your call in my life. Jesus, I trust in You.*

### ***Tuesday 21 July***

“Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?” And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my heavenly Father is my brother, and sister, and mother.” Mt. 12:48-50

This passage offers a wonderful opportunity to speak about the Blessed Virgin Mary. Some who read this passage fall into the trap of thinking that Jesus was in some way distancing Himself from His mother. It’s as if they conclude that His statement ignores her special role in His life. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The truth is that His statement affirms her motherhood more than anything. Why? Because He is speaking about how one becomes a true member of His family. And that happens when one “does the will of my heavenly Father.”

Think about that line. Who better fulfilled the will of the Heavenly Father? Who was more obedient in all things than the Blessed Virgin? No one was. She acted in perfect obedience throughout her life and, therefore, she perfectly fulfills the requirement of being Jesus’ family. One thing we should take from this passage is that our Blessed Mother’s relationship with Jesus was lived on two levels. First, there was the physical motherhood she was blessed with. This was an incredible grace and one for which she deserves great honor. But her physical motherhood was not the primary reason for her blessedness. The primary reason was a result of her spiritual motherhood. And this spiritual motherhood is seen in this passage above. It is the result of her perfect “Yes” to God in all things. This is the primary reason she is to be honored and called “blessed” for all ages.

Reflect, today, upon the role that our Blessed Mother holds in your life. God wants you to honor her, to imitate her and to make her part of your family. He wants you to receive her as your spiritual mother insofar as you are a member of Jesus’ family. If you strive for obedience to the will of the Father in your life you will also share in the blessings of His life. One of those great blessings is to share His mother.

*Lord, I do desire to be obedient to You and Your will in all things. I desire to embrace the Father’s perfect plan for my life. In that will, help me to share in Your divine life and become a full member of Your family. In that family, help me to take Your mother as my own. Dear Mother, pray for me. Jesus, I trust in You.*

### **Wednesday 22 July**

“But some seed fell on rich soil, and produced fruit, a hundred or sixty or thirtyfold. Whoever has ears ought to hear.” Mt. 13:8-9

The “ears” Jesus speaks of are much more than our physical ears. He is speaking of our interior lives through which we are able to hear, comprehend, accept and choose His holy will. He speaks His Word to us in many ways. The question to ponder is whether or not we are listening and are ready to allow His Word to soak in. Only by an attentiveness to His Word can we embrace His will.

Our souls must be like rich soil. This is a familiar image from Scripture, but it’s an image that is worth spending much time with in meditation. Rich soil in our souls is not easy to obtain. It’s much easier to be dry, thorny, rocky and unwelcoming soil. But to foster within ourselves a true richness and fertile soil requires much care and attention. How is this done?

One of the most important places to begin, so as to create rich soil within our souls, is to strive for true humility. Humility is ultimately all about seeing the truth of who we are and,

specifically, seeing the need for the grace of God in our lives. The humble admission that we are powerless without the grace of God is essential to creating rich soil within. From there, we must come to a point of total trust in God. When we first humble ourselves and recognize our total need for God, we will be in a position to trust Him when He speaks. And when He does speak, we will listen and obey with joy. Only then can the good fruit of His mercy be poured into our lives and, through us, into the lives of others. Reflect, today, upon your interior life. What is there? Is it more like dry rocky ground? Or do you regularly seek to nourish your soul and prepare it to receive the holy Word of God? Seek to create a fertile disposition within and the Lord will take care of bearing good fruit in your life. *Lord, help me to become truly fertile soil for Your most holy Word. May I receive all that You speak and may the seed of faith be planted deep within. Help this faith to grow and to produce the blessings You wish to bestow. Jesus, I trust in You.*

### **Thursday 23 July**

The disciples approached Jesus and said, "Why do you speak to the crowd in parables?" He said to them in reply, "Because knowledge of the mysteries of the Kingdom of heaven has been granted to you, but to them it has not been granted. To anyone who has, more will be given and he will grow rich; from anyone who has not, even what he has will be taken away." Mt. 13:10-12

Does that seem fair? At first read it may not. Why would Jesus promise more to those who have more, and less to those who have not? This goes to the heart of the mystery of grace, and the mystery of the Kingdom of Heaven!

First of all, we see that Jesus spoke in parables to the crowds but spoke clearly and directly to His disciples. Jesus explains that this is "Because knowledge of the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven has been granted to you, but to them it has not been granted." So, for that reason, Jesus speaks in veiled speech when speaking to the vast crowds.

To speak plainly here, what Jesus is saying is that some people are simply more open to the truth than others. When someone is not open, Jesus is limited and, thus, He must speak in parables. One goal of a parable is to get someone thinking. It's a way of drawing them in so that they can engage their minds with the Word that was spoken.

When someone is open to the Truth, such as the disciples, Jesus is able to lift the veil and speak clearly, deeply and beautifully about the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven. This must be our goal. We must seek to be those who "get it." We must seek to understand all Jesus speaks and believe it wholeheartedly. In fact, once we do begin to believe and, subsequently, live what we come to believe, we will begin a wonderful journey of faith and understanding that we never knew existed before.

This is what Jesus means when he says, "to anyone who has, more will be given." The life of grace is such that, once we begin to accept all that is true and then allow it to transform our lives, we will be given exponentially more than we ever imagined. And, on the flip side, when we refuse to listen and understand, even the little faith and understanding we have will slowly slip away into confusion.

Reflect, today, on how open you are to the Word of God and all that God wants to say to you. Seek to listen and understand. If you do this, you will discover that there is a glorious life of grace just waiting to be lavished upon you in full force.

*Lord, I do want to know You. I do want to seek You and to discover all that You have to say. Help me to turn to You in all things and to grow continually deeper in the life of faith. Jesus, I trust in You.*

### **Friday 24 July**

“The seed sown on rocky ground is the one who hears the word and receives it at once with joy. But he has no root and lasts only for a time. When some tribulation or persecution comes because of the word, he immediately falls away.” Mt. 13:20-21

Are you a “pop-Christian?” That may be a new word. But it gets at the heart of this particular Christian described above. This passage is one of four types of Christians identified in the Parable of the Sower. There are some who are like seed sown on a path, some like seed sown on rocky ground, some who are like seed sown in thorns, and some like seed sown in rich soil. Each one of these descriptions provide much to think about.

Let’s look at the Christian who is like seed sown on rocky ground, the one who has no roots. Practically speaking, this is the person who could be described as a “pop-Christian.” It’s the person who professes faith in Christ when it’s popular and well accepted by others. When it’s easy and convenient, this person is all in. But as soon as there is some challenge given to the Gospel, to the Word of God, and suddenly following Christ is not popular within the culture, this person is quick to choose the culture over the Truth.

This is a very real phenomenon in our day and age. The culture and the world as a whole are becoming more and more hostile toward the truth of our Christian faith. The world is becoming stronger, more influential, more of a bully, and appears to be winning the battle. This is a problem. And the real problem stems from too many Christians who lack deep roots in their life of faith.

The ideal is to have the Word of God sown deep into our hearts where there is rich soil. When this happens, the Word grows and becomes strong and stable. And in the midst of a cultural or social “storm,” the Christian with deep roots and deep faith will not waver.

Reflect, today, upon whether or not you are absolutely willing to stand with Christ and for the truth no matter how hard or unpopular it may be. Are you willing to endure the ridicule and misrepresentation the world gives to the Truth? Are you willing to stay strong in your faith in the midst of an increasingly secular society? If you struggle with being a “pop-Christian,” pray that God will sink His roots down deep into your heart so that you will be unwavering no matter the cost.

*Lord, I desire that Your Word sink deep into my heart. I desire to stay strong in my faith no matter the cost. Help me to be radical in my faith and in my love in all things. Jesus, I trust in You.*

### **Saturday 25 July**

“Let them grow together until harvest; then at harvest time I will say to the harvesters, ‘First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles for burning; but gather the wheat into my barn.’” Mt. 13:30

The evil all around us should be apparent to those with the eyes of faith. We only need to compare all that our Lord has revealed to us through the Scripture and the Church to the various values and opinions of the world. When we do so, we will be struck with the stark contrast between them.

Using the image of this parable, it would be like the farmer who goes out to check on his crop of wheat. As he does, he sees the weeds intermingled with the wheat. Though he sees both growing together, he is also aware of the fact that he cannot eliminate the weeds without pulling up the wheat. So instead of worrying about the growth of weeds, he puts his eyes on harvest time when the wheat will be harvested for good and the weeds will be gathered and burned.

So it must be with our lives. We will easily be tempted to despair if we become fixated upon the evil within our world. We shouldn't ignore it, but we ought not to become overly concerned about it. This is only possible if we, like the farmer, keep our eyes upon "harvest time." The great harvest we anticipate is the moment of divine justice when God rights every wrong and sorts out the good from the bad. Justice will prevail in the end even though it may not be readily apparent here and now.

Reflect, today, upon any ways that you find yourself affected by the evils of our world. Perhaps the constant stream of bad news in the media gets you down. Or, perhaps you encounter various evils in your daily life from others. Whatever the case may be, do not be shocked or scandalized by the attacks of the evil one. Keep your eyes fixed on our Lord and have full confidence in His divine justice to come.

*Lord, I trust in Your promise of fidelity in all things. As I see and experience various evils in this world, help me to never fall into their trap or lure. Free me from doubt and despair and give me perfect hope in Your promise of justice and mercy. Jesus, I trust in You.*

