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Wednesday's Gospel: The Teacher is Known by his Fruit

Gospel for Wednesday in the
12th Week of Ordinary Time,
and commentary.

Gospel (*Mt* 7:15-20)

Jesus said to his disciples:

“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles? So, every sound tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears evil fruit. A sound tree cannot

bear evil fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will know them by their fruits.”

Commentary

The Sermon on the Mount, which took place relatively early in our Lord's public life, astonished his hearers and broadened their horizons; they were being called to nothing less than perfection. At the end of this magnificent speech, “the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes” (*Mt* 7:28). His words were sure, and definitive; in his teaching there was not a shadow of doubt or hesitation. His message was understandable to everyone, and

was expressed in their everyday language. But at the same time it was sublime, and manifestly the word of God.

Today's Gospel passage is a good example of what impressed the crowds so much. Our Lord judges the false prophets, and pronounces the sentence of condemnation on them, with his own authority: "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."

It is a perennial problem. There were many prophets in the Old Testament who led the people astray, and later, in the time of the Fathers of the Church, there were teachers who were apparently pious and zealous, but who in reality did not have the mind and sentiments of Christ (cf. Saint Jerome, *Comm. in Matth.* 7). The same can also happen today.

In his discourse at the Last Supper, Jesus expanded on his earlier

teaching: “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If a man does not abide in me, he is cast forth as a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire and burned” (*Jn 15:5-6*).

The key to discernment, therefore, is whether the teacher spreads charity and unity, or if, on the contrary, he produces dissension and disunity – a bad fruit – in Christ’s Mystical Body, which is the Church. Sometimes the claim is heard that a dichotomy exists between proclaiming the truth and being charitable. Our Lord tells us in this passage that, in reality, truth and charity always go together. Therefore the disciple seeks the truth in unity with the Magisterium of the Church, through which the teaching of Christ is announced to the world.

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