

Commentary on the Gospel: The Eternal Fruit of Holiness

Gospel for the 11th Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year B), and commentary.

Gospel (*Mk 4:26-34*)

Jesus said to the crowds, “The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed upon the ground, and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he knows not how. The earth produces of itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. But when the grain is ripe, at

once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.”

And he said, “With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.”

With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; he did not speak to them without a parable, but privately to his own disciples he explained everything.

Commentary

Jesus is addressing a large crowd. Many of those listening to him work on the land and live from its fruits. So, as we read at the end of this passage, Jesus speaks to them in a way they are able to understand.

But our Lord not only wanted them to understand his words from an intellectual point of view. He wanted to fill them with enthusiasm for the message he is trying to convey, so that they would grasp that the words they were hearing were meant to become life.

What is the eager hope of a sower? Without doubt, to see what he sows bear fruit. Therefore Jesus wants to sow in those listening to him the holy desire to have a fruitful life. He wants to sow in them desires for holiness, for a fully fulfilled life.

So he insists that the seed will “sprout and grow, he knows not how.” Our Lord wants to remind us

that our deeds, when we do them in union with God, when we seek his glory, are never sterile. The testimony of Sacred Scripture is unanimous in this regard: when we work out of love for God, fruit will always come. “My chosen ones shall not labor in vain” (*Is 65:23*); “therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain” (*1 Cor 15:58*).

One of the great challenges to our faith can be, with the passage of time, the meager impact of our daily work, the apparent lack of progress in our spiritual life. Hence Jesus wants to encourage us not to give up, to remember that the Holy Spirit is acting in our soul without our realizing it and makes our life fruitful without us knowing how. Our faith, so many times, needs to be expressed in tenacious perseverance:

“by your endurance you will gain your souls” (*Lk 21:19*).

But Jesus goes further. He wants us to bear a great abundance of fruit (cf. *Jn 15:5*). That is why he makes use of the image of the mustard seed, which “becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches.”

To verify the truth of this invitation from our Lord, we need only look at the lives of the saints. We see so many examples of apparently ordinary lives, which perhaps went unnoticed by their contemporaries, but which have produced deep and lasting fruit. Don’t we continue to draw nourishment from the teachings of Saint Augustine and Saint Thomas? Don’t we continue to draw light from the writings of Saint Teresa and Saint John of the Cross? Doesn’t our heart continue to be moved by the courageous example of young people such as the martyrs

Saint Tarsicius and Saint Maria Goretti? They were like the grain of mustard seed: lives that in the eyes of many were insignificant, but that today enable so many people to “make nests in its shade.”

Thus, as on so many other occasions, Jesus wants to encourage us not to be afraid of holiness. God the Father is the “vine-grower” (cf. *Jn* 15:1) who wants to see us have a fruitful life. Hence this Gospel passage can be a wonderful opportunity to fully open the door of our heart to the Holy Spirit, who is the one who imbues each of our deeds with eternal value, including the most prosaic and ordinary ones, if we do them with love.

The lives of Our Lady and Saint Joseph were two humble “seeds” that God wanted to sow in Nazareth. They bore and will bear for all eternity

abundant fruit, in whose shade the whole Church is sheltered.

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