

Meditations: Monday of the Seventeenth Week of Ordinary Time

Some reflections that can guide
our prayer during the
seventeenth week of Ordinary
Time.

- The mustard seed
- Leaven in the flour
- Trusting in God's fruitfulness

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OUR LORD uses the parable of the mustard seed to describe the features of his kingdom. “The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches” (*Mt* 13:31-32). The seeds of this plant, cultivated in the Middle East, were famous for being so small. In fact, a common expression was that something was “as small as a mustard seed.” But when it grew it became a remarkably large shrub, almost fifteen feet high, with thick branches where the birds could find shelter.

The mustard seed, tiny as the head of a pin, possesses within itself an enormous vitality; it is called to spread out and welcome into its bosom the lives of many other living

beings. Hence Jesus uses it as a symbol for the Kingdom of God. To spread it on earth, Jesus didn't implement a program of political domination, nor did He manifest himself in a clamorous way to the whole world, as He could have done. On the contrary, his plan was to begin with the small seed of twelve fishermen, a few women (some of them anonymous, at least for us), and many other disciples without special social or cultural significance. All of them were his witnesses. The strength they had lay in the authenticity of their lives, in how they carried out to the ultimate consequences, out of love, what Christ had revealed to them through his works and his words.

Today, as yesterday, the mustard tree continues to grow in the fields of the Middle East. And today, as yesterday, the Kingdom of God has within itself the power to continue to expand

throughout the entire globe: “The kingdom is grace, God’s love for the world, the source of our serenity and trust.”^[1] But at the same time it is a goal that Jesus invites us to actively seek, indeed, to make it the main concern of our life: “Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness” (*Mt* 6:33). If we are truly seeking it, fighting with love our small daily battles for holiness, then all around us, even without our realizing it, abundant fruits of goodness and Christian life will grow.

“HE TOLD them another parable. ‘The kingdom of heaven is like leaven which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till it was all leavened’” (*Mt* 13:33). This very brief parable is similar to that of the mustard seed that precedes it in St. Matthew’s gospel. Once again we are

told that from small things will come great ones. But this time with the nuance that not only will growth result, but also a profound transformation.

The grace of God, faith and charity transform us personally, to the extent that we welcome them and allow them to grow in our hearts. And living in this way, ever more fully identified with the Gospel, necessarily produces deep changes in the world around us. “That is how the first Christians acted,” St. Josemaría said. “They didn't have any social or human programs to fulfill by reason of their supernatural vocation. But they were filled with a spirit, a view of life and the world that could not fail to have clear consequences on the society in which they lived.”^[2] — They were ordinary citizens and didn't cease to be such when they received the faith. But their whole existence took on a new

meaning that also renewed the world in which they lived, person by person.

Jesus presents us in this brief parable with a woman who is making bread, possibly part for her family and the rest to sell, since the three measures of flour that she mixes with the leaven would result in dozens of pounds of dough. This also reminds us that ordinary Christians transform the world through their daily work done for love of God and other men and women: this is how we can bring the Gospel to many people. “Our hearts should be filled with joy when we consider that what we are is just this: the leaven that transforms the dough. Our life is not self-centered; it is a battle on the front line. It is to immerse ourselves in the stream of society, passing unnoticed and reaching all hearts, carrying out in all of them the great work of transforming them into

wholesome bread, so that it be the peace – the joy and the peace – of all families, of all peoples.”^[3] —

“ALL THIS Jesus said to the crowds in parables,” St. Matthew tells us; “indeed he said nothing to them without a parable” (*Mt 13:34*). Today we too listen to our Lord’s parables anew, so that they may bear the fruit of hope in our own souls. Two thousand years of Christianity have gone by, and the tiny seed has grown throughout the whole world; the leaven has fermented the dough of countless peoples and cultures. But this has been possible because the Kingdom has grown from heart to heart, in the life of each Christian, first in those who want to bring the joy of the Gospel to every corner of the world.

There is still so much to do, and also to redo, first of all in our own lives. Moreover, what seemed to have been achieved does not always last. Just as it is not easy to fully embody the Gospel in one's own life, neither is the apostolic mission that God has entrusted to every Christian free from setbacks: "New difficulties are constantly surfacing: experiences of failure and the human weaknesses which bring so much pain. We all know from experience that sometimes a task does not bring the satisfaction we seek; results are few and changes are slow, and we are tempted to grow weary."^[4] —

In such moments, when we may feel somewhat discouraged, faith spurs us to trust in the vitality of the small seed in our heart, in the effectiveness of the handful of leaven that ferments a great quantity of dough. Even if it might seem that our work is fruitless, that there is still so much

to do and so little we can do about it, we have the certainty “that God is able to act in every situation, even amid apparent setbacks, because ‘we have this treasure in earthen vessels (2 Cor 4:7). This certainty is often called ‘a sense of mystery.’ It involves knowing with certitude that all those who entrust themselves to God in love will bear good fruit (cf. *Jn* 15:5). This fruitfulness is often invisible, elusive and unquantifiable.”^[5] No act done out of love for God and for others is useless. Sometimes we will not see the fruits directly; other times they will come in unexpected ways and will always produce a growth in our own heart. We can ask our Lady to strengthen our trust in the fruit that our lives will produce if we stay close to her Son.

^[1] Saint John Paul II, General Audience, 6 December 2000.

^[2] St. Josemaría, *Letter* 29.

^[3] St. Josemaría, *Letter 1*, no. 5c.

^[4] Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 277.

^[5] *Ibid.*, no. 279.

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