

6th Sunday after Epiphany- EF 2012
Matthew 13: 31-35
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We have a pair of parables about the power of God. What may appear to us to be the least is transformed by God's grace to the most.

Our first example is the mustard seed. When left to its fruition, the seed becomes a tree that provides shelter, a home where one is protected from evil.

In nature the seed is small, but packed with power and potential. It is plain in appearance, but when bruised or crushed it shows forth its power. ⁱ

Cannot Jesus' life, passion, death and resurrection be described in similar terms? He was born in humble circumstances, sharing a manger with livestock. He experienced ridicule and torture. He suffered the humiliation of public execution on the cross. And yet through it, Jesus was raised by the power of the Holy Spirit and creation was made anew. Salvation was made freely available to all mankind.

The same could be said of our martyrs, upon whose blood the Church was built. Their example has caught my imagination since my youth. Given the choice to deny Jesus or face the lions, they chose to witness to Jesus with their lives and with their very own death. They joined their lives to Jesus in the paschal mystery and found eternal life. Their witness transformed the Mediterranean region and then the entire world. People asked who were these people who would choose the lions. In their search for the answer, the world learned about Jesus and found their savior.

And yet, what word can I use to describe how intimidating is the prospect of death? Our vain personal attempts at immortality sometimes twists our judgment and causes us to do things that are injurious to our soul instead of accepting the immortality that Jesus has won for us.

I do pray for a restful sleep and a peaceful death. But I am not promised that I will avoid the challenge of choosing between denying Jesus or facing death. I pray for the grace that filled the martyrs should I be put to the test.

I remember a story about a priest on his deathbed. He was asked if he was afraid of dying. He said, "No. I've done this a thousand times before." He was of course referring to coming to Jesus' table and entering into his paschal mystery, day after day, decade after decade. When we come to this table, we enter into the mystery of Jesus' death and resurrection. May that give us the courage to face what all of us fear.

The parables in Matthew are recorded in pairs and so our second of the pair is the parable of the leaven.

Leaven is a fermenting agent (like yeast) added to a batch of dough and causing it to rise and expand. Three measures of flour [mentioned in the Gospel] would be something like fifty pounds of flour and the bread baked from this amount would provide a meal for more than a hundred persons.ⁱⁱ So we can see how these parables highlight the contrast between small beginnings and great results.ⁱⁱⁱ

What caught my eye in the parable of the leaven was that the verb “hid” was used for the adding of the leaven. St. John Chrysostom commented:

For the leaven, when placed in the dough, and not simply placed there but thoroughly kneaded into it, ferments the whole mass; for which reason He did not say simply place in the dough but “hid in it”. So likewise, when you shall be one with, and commingled with your attackers, then shall you overcome them. And as the leaven hidden in the dough is not destroyed, but rather changes the dough into its own nature, so shall you also do in the preaching of the Gospel.^{iv}

So, who are our attackers? There are some who truly wish to inflict harm. But the “attackers” I am thinking about may not be doing so with malice in their hearts. In their ignorance, they may feel they are honoring some principle, but in truth are harming a greater good, a sacred good. Such sacred goods include the unborn, the infirm, the aged, the institution of marriage and the freedom of worship.

St. John Chrysostom would have us thoroughly kneaded into our culture, to ferment the whole mass, be hid into it, commingled in it and in so doing change the culture through the Gospel.

We are called to engage in our culture. Pray that the weight of the culture does not corrupt us, but that being one with our culture, we may be Christ’s yeast in transforming it.

So... as we look at our own lives, when we are bruised, do we respond so that others may see the power of the Paschal Mystery? When tragedy or the weight of time crushes us, will others be inspired by our lives lived in hope of the Resurrection?

Do we allow God to knead us into the dough of the world about us? Can we be the ones thoroughly “hid’ into the masses who could transform our culture from one of death into a culture of life?

Bring your “yes” to this altar and enter into the paschal mystery of Christ.

ⁱ St. Ambrose, *The Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers*, v. 1 p. 349

ⁱⁱ Daniel J. Harrington, S.J., *The Gospel of Matthew, Sacra Pagina*, p. 205

ⁱⁱⁱ *ibid*, p.209

^{iv} St. John Chrysostom, *The Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers*, v.1, p. 352