

Wednesday's Gospel: Eternal Truths in Everyday Language

Gospel for Wednesday in the
16th Week of Ordinary Time,
and commentary.

Gospel (*Mt 13:1-9*)

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. And great crowds gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat there; and the whole crowd stood on the beach. And he told them many things in parables, saying: "A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them.

Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they had not much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil, but when the sun rose they were scorched; and since they had no root they withered away. Other seeds fell upon thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. He who has ears, let him hear.”

Commentary

This parable represents a new beginning in our Lord's ministry. Until now his teaching had been clear and explicit, and easily understood by the crowds. So we can understand their surprise when, after his beautiful description of the sower and the seed, instead of

explaining the parable to them, he ended abruptly: “He who has ears, let him hear.” Indeed, Jesus did provide the interpretation, but only later, privately to the apostles.

The meaning of this parable seems obvious to us, but in reality it is because we have our Lord’s own explanation (cf. *Mt* 13:18-23). But for the crowds hearing it for the first time on the shores of the lake, it sounded mysterious, like a riddle without an answer. The implication was that they would have to discover the meaning; and the only sure way to do so was to ask a teacher, someone accredited by Jesus himself. By teaching in parables and giving the key to their meaning to the apostles, Jesus gave them authority to teach in his name, while training them for their role. Here we can discern, at least in practice, the beginning of the Church’s teaching authority.

In the Introduction to his Commentary on the Book of Job, Saint Gregory the Great wrote: *“Scripture is like a broad river, shallow enough here for the lamb to go wading, but deep enough there for the elephant to swim”* (Gregory the Great, *Moralia*, Letter to Leander, 4). This description is very appropriate for our Lord’s parables, and is what makes them an ideal teaching method for listeners of different abilities; everyone can learn something from them.

Christians of all times have learned from this practice of our Lord how to communicate the contents of the faith with words that a variety of audiences can understand. The truths remain unchanged, but the language is adapted to the mentality of the times and the capacity of the listeners. We can ask the Holy Spirit to help us find the appropriate words so that our listeners too can

assimilate the teaching contained there (cf. *Lk* 12:12).

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