

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius  
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Third Sunday after Pentecost  
June 14, 2015

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You have heard me say many times St Mark's Gospel reads like it was written in a hurry and meant to be read in a hurry. The Evangelist's intended readers were suffering persecution. They needed the good news, and they needed it now. The good news was in the great saving events we commemorate in Holy Week and Easter. Mark's Gospel is in a hurry to get to Holy Week.

So it is no surprise that in the case of the Parable of the Mustard Seed, St Mark has left off the *companion* Parable of the Leaven. You can find the complete *double parable* in both St Matthew and St Luke. After giving the Lord's teaching on the mustard seed, St Mark says, "And with many such parables spake he the word unto them." For Mark's purpose it was time to move on.

The double parable preserves the Lord's teaching and also serves as a reminder that even in a male-dominated society, The Son of God always acknowledged the women, who after all were half the human race He had created. The Lord's inclusive preaching style is evidence of this. Describing the end times the Lord said "Two *men* will be working in the field, one will be taken and the other left." Then after a pause the teaching continues. "Two *women* shall be grinding at the mill, one shall be taken and the other left." On the preciousness of every person, Jesus taught "If a *man* has a hundred sheep and loses one doesn't he search for it all day and rejoice when it is found?" Then he continues, "Or suppose it is a *woman* who has only ten pennies in the house; if she loses one what a fuss there is about it!" If you heard the double parable today, Jesus says the kingdom of Heaven is like a *man* planting a mustard seed, but also like a *woman* putting leaven into a lump of dough. John Henry Newman gave as a definition of a gentleman: "His eyes are on all his company." Blessed Jesus is the Divine gentleman, and "His eyes are on all His company." His preaching is to one and all.

How, precisely, is the Kingdom of God connected to a grain of mustard seed or a morsel of leaven? And what does the mustard seed and lump of yeast have in common? The Lord made the connection, and inquiring minds want to know.

You cannot watch a mustard seed growing, or watch the leaven at work. You know they are working and bound to take their effect. The mustard seed and the leaven

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have this in common. That is the first point. It is also an observable fact the Church sometimes seems to grow up mysteriously, in spite of all attempts to stop her. So here we are on to something.

The mustard seed grows by *taking* something from its environment: rain, sunlight, and soil. The Kingdom of God in Christ's Mystical Body the Catholic Church does the same. She takes from her environment every time she snatches a soul away from pagan and secular mindsets and makes it a child of light. When Christ's Church wins the devil loses. And the devil does lose! The Church began with Our Lord's Mother, twelve apostles, and 120 other souls waiting for the Holy Ghost at Pentecost.

The leaven operates in an *opposite* way. It does not grow or take anything from its surroundings. Leaven *gives* of itself to what is around it. The second happening at Pentecost was that, in addition to a body of faithful souls, small at the beginning like the mustard seed, something else was present. The something else was Someone Else, *The Holy Ghost*. Call the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity an influence or even an infection, the Holy Ghost "bloweth where He listeth" (in a famous *King James Version* phrase) and His Ghostly presence has penetrated and permeated the whole world ever since. There is no earthly means of gauging the strength of the Holy Ghost. We can only observe the result: The Church growing rapidly in places where Christian witnesses have been martyrs for the faith: places like the former Soviet Union, China, and Japan, and in Africa. There may be brutal suppression, no priests, no sacraments, no preaching, and no churches. But the Holy Ghost "bloweth where He listeth."

The mustard seed and the leaven begin a process which must go on to the inevitable end. Whether the intervening time is short or long does not enter into the calculation. The wonder is in the contrast between small beginnings and the end. Does the unimpressive little band of 133 people at Pentecost become the vast array of wedding guests in God's Messianic Age? *Yes*, says Jesus. He gives the double parable to teach the point. The certainty is the same as that a small grain grows into a tall shrub or a small piece of yeast produces a vast amount of bread dough. And

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those who doubt receive a divine verdict: “Do ye not therefore err because ye know not the power of God?” (Mark 12:24)