

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius  
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on the Third Sunday after Trinity  
June 17, 2018

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All right. Here is your Biblical textual criticism for today. In case you needed it! 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. Mark's readers were suffering persecution and they needed to know Who loved them. The good news was in the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus the Son of God.

That explains why in recounting the Parable of the Mustard Seed, St Mark left off the companion Parable of the Leaven. The Gospels of Matthew and Luke give us the *complete* double parable. After all, the Lord Jesus likened the Kingdom of God to mustard seed *and* leaven. St Mark slots in the teaching about the mustard seed and then says, "And with many such parables spake he the word to them." Which was true enough! For St Mark's Gospel, however, it was time to get to Holy Week.

Somewhere Blessed John Henry Newman gave a definition of a gentleman. "His eyes are on all his company." In other words, "include your whole audience." Our Lord Jesus certainly did that. He always acknowledged both men and women who heard His preaching and were attracted to the gospel. We hear this in the Lord's preaching and in His parables. Describing the end times Jesus began, "Two *men* will be working in the field, one will be taken and the other left." Then after a pause, the Lord continued, "Two *women* shall be grinding at the mill, one shall be taken and the other left." Teaching about the preciousness of every person Jesus said, "If a *man* has a hundred sheep and loses one doesn't he search for it all day and rejoice when it is found?" And then the great Teacher adds, "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!"

So if you had heard the complete double parable today you would heard Jesus say the Kingdom of Heaven is like a *man* planting a mustard seed, but also like a *woman* putting leaven into a lump of dough. Here is Blessed Jesus preaching to one and all. No one is left out. "His eyes are on all His company."

Having established the Lord's inclusiveness, it is time to discover why He likens the Kingdom of God to a grain of mustard seed and a morsel of leaven. At first the connection is not obvious. You cannot watch a mustard seed grow, (unless you

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film the whole process and press fast-forward!) Nor can you watch the leaven at work. You know they are changing their environment and the change is bound to have an observable effect. And here we begin to understand the connection with the Kingdom of God. The Church sometimes seems to grow up mysteriously, in spite of all attempts to watch it, or even to *stop* it.

The mustard seed grows by *taking something from* its environment. It takes rain, sunlight, and soil. The Kingdom of God in Christ's mystical Body the Catholic Church certainly takes from its surroundings every time it snatches a soul away from pagan and secular mindsets and engrafts that soul into the children of light. What 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, on the other hand, operates differently. It does not grow or take anything from its surroundings. Leaven *gives of itself* to what is around it. The example of leaven helps us understand something else about Pentecost. The Lord left not only a body of faithful souls (which was small like a mustard seed.) Something else was in the mix. The Holy Ghost! Call the Third Person of the Holy Trinity an influence if you will, an *infectious* influence like leaven. He "bloweth where He listeth" is a famous *King James Version* description. His Ghostly inspiration has penetrated and permeated the world ever since, and there is no earthly measuring equipment to gauge the strength of the Holy Ghost. We can only marvel at the phenomenon of how the Church grows rapidly in places where there is brutal suppression, no priests, no sacraments, no preaching, and no churches: places like the former Soviet Union and present-day China. And why should we be surprised? Remember a pagan Roman soldier, unlucky enough to be on crucifixion duty, one day got an assist in providing the Church's sacramental life when he opened up the side of the dead Saviour of the world.

Both with the mustard seed and the leaven a process is begun which must go on to the end. And it matters not whether the intervening time is long or short. Could an unimpressive little band of 120 people become the uncountable number of wedding guests of God's Messianic Age? Yes, says Blessed Jesus in the double parable. It

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will happen as certainly as a small grain grows into a tall shrub or a small piece of yeast produces a vast amount of bread dough. And on those who doubt this, the Divine verdict is given by the Lord. “Do ye not therefore err because ye know not the power of God?” (Mark 12:24)