

Homily for Sunday, July 19, 2020

My Brothers and Sisters, in Today's Gospel passage, Our Lord gives us three parables. The First, and its interpretation, takes most of the space. I think the other two are not always noticed. I am going to say a few words about the Third Parable today. It is a simple image, and a gentle image. It is a parable about a woman making bread, and kneading the dough.

This week our parish staff reflected on this parable. In the discussion we were reminded that over the past few months making bread has become more popular in our country. When we began to stay at home because of the Coronavirus, newspapers reported that people were cooking more. More people were buying yeast to make homemade bread.

I was also reminded that baking takes a little bit more care than stove-top cooking. Too much yeast, or too little yeast – and the bread does not turn out the way we expected.

Even this small parable is full of surprises, as we have come to expect in Jesus' parables. I found a really good reflection on Jesus' parable about the woman and the yeast from Bishop Mueggenborg of Seattle, Washington. For the rest of this Homily – I share his words with you.

“The third parable is about a woman who hides leaven in three measures of flour. Three measures of flour are a huge amount. It would be the equivalent of about fifty pounds! She is preparing a meal for a lot of people. Actually, she's preparing food for a great banquet: the banquet of the Kingdom of God.

The surprising element of this parable is that she uses leaven in a positive way. Leaven (yeast) in the Jewish tradition and in the New Testament was traditionally a symbol for corruption, arrogance and pride (Ex 12:15–20, 23:18, 34:25, Lev 2:11, 6:10, Mt 16:6, 1 Cor 5:6–8, Gal 5:9). By using this image, Jesus is teaching us that God can even use human weaknesses to bring about His Kingdom.

That is a powerful message! God used, for example, the ambition of Ignatius of Loyola to lead him to seek eternal greatness in God's glory (Lt: *Ad maiorem Dei gloriam*). God used the youthful arrogance of Francis of Assisi to lead him to detachment from worldly concerns. God was even able to transform Paul of Tarsus from one who was filled with zeal to persecute Christians into someone who was filled with zeal to promote the Gospel (cf. Acts 9:1–19).

Also, note that [in the original Greek,] the woman [“hid”] the leaven in the flour. [In today's translation, it says ‘mixed’.] People are usually described as placing it in flour rather than hiding it. Our Lord is very clear in telling us that she hid it.

“That is because the Kingdom of God remains hidden to those who do not seek it, but to those of faith, the Kingdom of God is visible and active in the world and will grow to produce a huge result from a small beginning. Indeed, in the Kingdom of God, the Lord can use even our arrogant, prideful, and corrupt actions to accomplish His will. Saint Paul captured this truth well when he wrote, “Where sin abounds, grace abounds much more” (Rom 5:20).”

“How have you seen God use tendencies of human weakness, failure, or corruption as the means of accomplishing His grace and rule in people's lives?”

“When have you turned to the Lord in a moment of personal failure to surrender to God's will in your life?”

“When have you been surprised to discover God in unexpected places and circumstances in your life?”

“Why do you think Jesus needed to remind the disciples that the Kingdom of God is both present in the form of “leaven” and “hidden”?””