

Gospel of St. Mark Chapter 4

READ MK 4:1-2

B/c of Jesus' growing popularity & the large crowds, He gets on a boat to preach to the crowd nearby on the shore. Our Lord's teachings contained many parables. Our OSB Glossary states a parable is a story, based on familiar examples related to the daily lives of the hearers, told to illustrate a greater truth. -OSB 61-62

From the OSB article at MT 13 (pg 1292):

Parables are stories in word pictures, revealing spiritual truth. The Hebrew & Aramaic words for "parable" also mean "allegory," "riddle," or "proverb." The Scriptures, especially the Gospels, are filled with parables -images drawn from daily life in the world to represent and communicate the deep things of God. Parables give us glimpses of Him whose thoughts are not our thoughts and whose ways are not our ways (cf. Is 55:8,9). An O.T. example is the Prophet Nathan's story to King David about the ewe lamb to convict him about murdering Uriah (see 2 Kingdoms 12 in our LXX or 2 Sam 12 in other Bibles).

IMPORTANT: The truth communicated by Jesus' parables is NOT evident to all who hear them. WHY? The listener must have spiritual ears to hear, and even then not all have the same degree of understanding. -OSB, 1292

This meant, if the hearer's heart was open to the truth, he would be able to perceive the inner meaning, whereas if the heart was not open, he would not be able to perceive it. That is why the Lord taught them of the Kingdom in parables. The true, reachable, and

humble of heart would learn but the unbelieving and stubborn would 'see and not perceive,' they would 'hear and not have insight' (v. 12). -OBS, 62

What do you think Jesus' statement that 'to those who are outside, all things come in parables' (v. 11) means? This could be translated, '...all things come in riddles' (quoting Isaiah 59:10 / Mt 13:14, 15). This doesn't mean He used parables to blind people or lead them [astray]. It shows that the people [themselves] are responsible for their own lack of receptivity; having become dull and unreceptive, they are unwilling to accept the message of the parables. [...] -OSB 61-62

Jesus' parables challenge the hearer and call for faith to perceive the mysteries of the Kingdom. Insight into God's Kingdom does not come simply through an intellectual understanding of the parables. Spiritual enlightenment is essentially a communication of faith in the Person, words, and deeds of the Lord Jesus Christ. -OBS 61-62.

We need the Holy Spirit's help to understand -which is why we even give our infants and children Baptism, Chrismation and Holy Communion.

Our goal is "Union with God" (*Theosis*). Theosis and understanding of His truth takes work and prayer. This is why our monks spend their whole lives in prayer and repentance. It's also why our greatest theologians were mostly monastics b/c they come to know God through prayer].

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ICSB MK 4:2 Parables are a teaching method with two purposes (1) they conceal Jesus' message from the faithless, so that the stories... have no impact on those who react to His claims with

opposition and violence. (2) They reveal the mystery of Jesus' mission to those who believe and embrace His message. These parables draw us into the divine mysteries according to the measure and intensity of our faith.

READ MK 4:3-20

OSB Note MK 4:13-20

St. Mark's Gospel relates five of the Lord's parables starting with the Parable of the Sower. One of the chief lessons of this is that all in Israel will not experience the Kingdom of God equally. All will not be saved and enjoy the kingdom just because they are Jews. The experience of the Kingdom will depend on the state of each person's heart.-OBS 64-66.

The Lord says the coming of the Kingdom is like a sower of seed going out to sow. In those days, sowers would walk along a narrow path through the fields, throwing seed from a bag onto the wide earth. Inevitably, not all the seed would fall into fertile earth and germinate; some would be lost. The same was with God's Word of the coming Kingdom. Just as whether or not the seed germinated depended on the state of the soil, so the experience of salvation depended on the state of the hearer's heart. -P. 64.

Some of this seed falls beside the road (v. 4) where the birds come and eat it up. This is like those who hear the Word and immediately Satan comes and takes the Word from their hearts, as they listen to the lies about Jesus (see 3:22). So the seed of the Word does not grow in their lives.-OBS 64-66.

The seed that falls on the rocky soil (v. 5) doesn't have much earth. So the plant springs up without any real roots, and the sun

burns it up. This is symbolic of people who have faith so shallow that it is only temporary. Just as seed sown on the rocks can't germinate, so also these people of shallow faith bear no fruit.- OBS 64-66.

Some of the seeds sown by a sower fall into the thorns (or weeds) and they choke out the seeds (v. 7). This is like those who allow the worries of this age and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things into their hearts. Just as seed sown among thorns can't give fruit, so attendance to such worldly concerns makes the Kingdom of God unfruitful in our lives. -OBS 64-66.

The seed that falls in good earth (v. 8) germinates, grows and gives fruit. Notice that the crops vary, some bearing a crop of thirty fold, some sixtyfold and some even a hundred fold. This is like those who respond to Jesus' message, accepting it and becoming truly His disciples. In them the Kingdom of God comes and bears fruit (in some more than others). -OBS 64-66.

ICSB MK 4:38 Notice Jesus' graphic language ("devoured," "scorched," and "choked" (4, 6-7) which is meant to underline the opposition facing the spread of the Gospel.

Notice that the meaning of this parable is not immediately understood even by His disciples. Later (v. 10) they ask Him to explain it. Does Jesus scold them? What does He do? Rather than scold them Jesus tells them they are privileged beyond all others in Israel... that they are given "the mystery of the Kingdom of God." The Greek word for mystery is *musterion*, which doesn't mean "incomprehensible." It means something "secret" - something revealed only to the those "on the inside" as the disciples were. -OBS 64-66.

ICSB 4:14-20 Notice that Jesus explains the parable to His disciples only when they are “alone” (v. 10). The crowd that is “outside” does not get to hear its interpretation.

This tells us something about the Church and the way God made it. St. Paul said the Church is the Pillar and Foundation of the truth (1 Tim 3:15). It has the key to understanding the inner meaning of God's salvation, “while to those on the outside have all in parables and insolvable puzzles” (another way to translate v. 11). Jesus helps His disciples to understand this in order that as a key they may understand all His parables (v. 13). -OBS 64-66.

READ MK 4:21-23

St. Mark then records a second parable, that of the lamp. Every evening, in every Jewish home, there would be the ritual of the lamp, when a lamp would be brought into the main room to give light to all. When the lamp arrived, the pious Jews would recite a blessing, thanking God for the light. -OBS 66-67. Similarly there was a ritual of the lighting of the lamps in the Old Testament Temple.

We in the Byzantine tradition inherited this from the early Christians who would lite a lamp during Vespers (evening prayer) and recite a blessing thanking God for Christ who is the true Light of the world. In fact, our evening hymn, "Phos Hilaron" (O Joyful Light), comes from this. -OBS 66-67.

Obviously everyone knew that it was put on the lampstand so that the darkness was dispelled and all could receive the light. In the same way Christ, the Light of the World, had come to teach and illuminate everyone. Therefore His Word, His truth should be

shared with all to bring them out of darkness into His marvelous light (1 Pet 2:9).

Regarding verse 11: Although the mystery of the kingdom is temporarily secret and hidden in parables (v. 11), its true meaning will eventually be manifest and come to light to those who have the eyes to see and the ears to hear (v. 23) -OBS 66-67.

ICSB 4:21-22 This is a parable about the purpose of Jesus' teaching. Although the mystery of the kingdom is temporarily hidden and secret in parable, its true meaning will eventually be manifest and come to light (Lk 12:2).

READ MK 4:24-25

The third parable is that of the measure. The hearers are warned to take care not to hear with hardened hearts. A measure is a basket or a container -same word used in v. 21). If one brings a big measure then one receives a correspondingly big portion of what is being given out. But if one brings a small container, then one can only receive a small amount. In the same way we must approach God's Word with a big and open heart (2 Cor 6:11-13). So he who has... gets (v. 25). He who does not have... loses even what he does have. -OBS 67.

OSB Note MK 4:24

READ MK 4:26-29

The fourth parable is that of the scattered seed. Just as the earth bears fruit by itself, so the Kingdom will come without the military assistance of men. It will grow at its own rate -first the grass, then the head, then the full grain in the head. The long-awaited

judgment will come at its own time. Just as the farmer will come with the sickle only when the harvest is ripe. Only when God decides the time is right will He judge the earth. -OBS 68.

OSB Note MK 4:26-29

READ MK 4:30-32

The fifth & last parable is that of the mustard seed. The people needed such an image of the Kingdom and were probably reminded by all the mustard seeds growing in their area. Just as the ministry of Jesus seemed to be small and insignificant, it was THE Kingdom of God which would eventually topple earthly kingdoms and overthrow sin from the earth. -OBS 69.

OSB Note MT 13:31 (Pg. 1293).

READ MK 4:33-34

OSB Note MK 4:33

St. Mark concludes this section pointing out (v. 33) that these five parables were just a selection and not the only ones Jesus used. There were many others He used to to measure out the truth as they were able to hear, according to the openness of their heart. - OBS 70.

Privately to His Apostles He explained all things (v. 34). Again the Church has a special position as the depository of God's truth.

Just as Jesus especially explained His truth to His apostles, they in turn did this for their successors and the Church has maintained this same truth down to our day.

KEY: This is how we know if any given teaching is true or not: if it is accord with the teaching the Church has maintained. -OBS 70.

INTRO: In this next section St. Mark relates three miracles which shows Christ's authority over violent nature (4:35-41), over demons (5:1-20), and even over sickness and death (5:21-43). These demonstrations of power provoke questions, "Who then is this?" (4:41). This is meant for us to consider. This carpenter and Son of Mary as He is called (v. 6:3), could He truly be the Son of the Most High God (see 5:7)? -OBS 70.

READ MK 4:35-41

Perhaps Jesus was exhausted because He was able to sleep through such a violent storm. The great storm of wind throws wave after wave against the little boat, so much so that it begins to fill up and there is a threat of capsizing and them drowning. Jesus, however, is in the stern asleep. God's only begotten Son is asleep resting in His Father's protection but His disciples have no such faith in God's protection. Though fishermen intimately familiar with this lake, they are terrified. So what do they do?

They cry out, "Teacher does it not mattter to You that we are perishing?" We can detect a note of exasperation and even rebuke in this question as a result of their terror. -OBS 71-72

With just a couple of words, Jesus makes the winds cease and a great calm happens. He rebukes the violent storm in the same way that He rebuked the violent demons (see 1:25) and demonstrates His complete divine authority over all. OBS 71-72 This is a message to all who believe in Him that we should trust Him no matter what.

Then having dealt with the present life-threatening storm, He turns back to deal with His disciples, with a kind of rebuke of His own: "Why are you afraid?" The word in Greek , *deilos* is used also for cowards in Rev. 21:8). He asks them (v. 40), "How is it that you have no faith?" In other words, could they imagine that God would let the Messiah and His chosen disciples drown? As a result of this experience, the disciples are left in wonder, "Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him!" OBS 71-72

Christ is Risen!

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