

# THE SUNDAY GOSPELS EXPLAINED

## New Year and Epiphany

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### NEW YEAR'S DAY

Feast of the Circumcision of Our Lord.

Gospel: St. Luke 2/21.

“He was Given the Name Jesus.”

PARENTS know what a problem it is to find a satisfactory name for a child. Our Lady was spared this anxiety. At the Annunciation St. Gabriel told her that her Son must be called Jesus (Luke 1/31). When St. Joseph agreed to accept the legal paternity of the Child conceived by the action of the Holy Spirit, he was given the same order (Matthew 1/18-21).

The Holy Name means “God is salvation.” This Name was to be given to Mary’s Child, the angel told St. Joseph, “because He shall save His people from their sins.” That is, this Child was the Divine Saviour coming to redeem mankind—to make it possible, even after the Fall, for men to become children of God again and to see Him face to face for evermore. He alone, in God’s plans, could bring this about, so “there is no other name under heaven given to men whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4/12). There is, then, no greater name than that of the Our Saviour. It is “the Name that is above every name,” the Name at which “every knee should bend in heaven, on earth, and under the earth” (Philippians 2/9-10). Hence, this all-holy Name should be always held in the greatest reverence and should be used only with pious love and devotion.

In the Holy Name is summed up all Our Lord’s work in the world. He came into this world “to seek out and to save what was lost” (Luke 19/10). His Name, therefore, is the most comforting and consoling of all names; for it is the Name of a supremely great Person who came to save us from the worst of all evils. Far from filling the sinner with fear and dread, the Name of Jesus inspires him with hope and confidence, because it expresses love and mercy. And to all—saint and sinner alike—it is a Name of strength and power, a pledge of God’s help and protection. That is why we use the Holy Name so often in prayer and in times of temptation.

May this great Name, then, be our support and strength throughout the journey of life, and on our dying lips may it be our comfort and the assurance of our salvation.

### SUNDAY BETWEEN THE CIRCUMCISION AND THE EPIPHANY

Feast of the Most Holy Name of Jesus.

The Gospel of today’s Mass is the same as for New Year’s Day, which is explained, above.

### THE EPIPHANY OF OUR LORD (Jan. 6th)

Gospel: St. Matthew 2/1-12

”Wise Men Came Out of the East.”

Our Lord was born “in the days of King Herod.” This was Herod I. He is often called Herod the Great, to distinguish him from various descendants of his who also became rulers in Palestine. He came of a race called the Edomites or Idumaeans, who were descended from Abraham through Esau. The Jews were descended from Jacob, Esau’s twin-brother, so the Idumaeans and the Jews were kindred peoples, but only the Jews had been chosen by God as His Covenant People. The descendants of Esau, therefore, were really outsiders.

In 109 B.C. the Jewish king, John Hyrcanus, conquered Idumaea and forced the descendants of Esau to accept the religion of Jacob. But no real fusion of the two peoples occurred. Every Jew knew that an Idumaeon was no true son of Israel (Jacob).

The Romans captured Jerusalem in 63 B.C., but they allowed Jews to rule in Palestine. During a period of weak government an Idumaeon named Antipater became powerful. His son Herod won the favour of the Romans, and in 40 B.C., at the request of Mark Antony, the Roman Senate appointed Herod King of the Jews. The Jews refused to accept him as king, and it was only in 37 B.C., with the help of a Roman army, that he was able to capture Jerusalem and

establish himself in his capital city. The Jews nevertheless continued to look on him as an outsider—neither true Jew nor real king. Driven by fear and passion, Herod struck down all possible rivals, even some of his own sons. Finally, the Roman Emperor forbade him to execute any member of his family without permission from Rome.

Then, one day, some strangers from far away eastwards rode into Jerusalem and innocently asked: “Where is He that has been born King of the Jews? We have seen His star in the East, and we have come to worship him.” The question disturbed the whole city. It suggested that there existed a direct challenge to the man who had been appointed King of the Jews by the Roman Senate. Moreover, if He were born King of the Jews, He must be the Messiah, and so, according to the Jewish ideas of the time, He would establish again the kingdom of His father David. Clearly, Herod would not face such a threat calmly.

We call these strangers “Magi.” Originally they were the priests of the Medes. In time these priests spread over a wide area between the Arabian Desert and India. Individuals among them could be mere sorcerers like Simon Magus (Acts 8/9), but in general they were educated men who made a study of the stars and tried to interpret their meaning. The religion of the Magi was remarkably spiritual. The Greek historian Herodotus said that hymns and prayers were their principal worship. These prayers, he said, were addressed to “the Supreme God Who fills the wide circle of heaven.”

The Magi were not kings, though they could have been men of considerable importance in their own country. They seem to have been wealthy, as they were able to make the long journey to Palestine.

When the Magi’s question was reported to King Herod he immediately called a council of learned Jews and asked them where the Messiah would be born. They promptly answered: “In Bethlehem.” And they quoted the prophet Micah .(5/2) in proof. Herod then interviewed the Magi in secret. He was most anxious to know when they had first seen the star. Then he told them to go to Bethlehem and find the newborn King. When they had paid their homage to Him they must return and tell King Herod, so that he, too, could go and worship Him.

The Magi turned south from Jerusalem, and then suddenly their star shone out again and brought them to the cradle of Israel’s true King. As the Magi rejoiced greatly when they saw the star, it seems that the star had not guided them all the way. They saw it from their own country, and somehow they understood its meaning, so they had set out for the capital city of the country of the Jews. There, they naturally thought, they would find the royal Child. Of Herod they had no suspicions.

The star has been the subject of much speculation. Various astronomers and Scripture scholars have tried to identify it with Halley’s Comet or with some grouping of planets, but no convincing case seems to have been put forward in favour of a purely natural explanation of the star. As the star would have moved from north to south as the Magi went from Jerusalem to Bethlehem, it seems best to regard it as a preternatural guide provided for the Magi by God’s Providence. He guided by the direction of an angel the Israelite shepherds, who would be familiar with the accounts of angelic manifestations in the history of their people. The Magi were astronomers, so God guided them to the Crib by a star.

The star brought the Magi to a house. Apparently, the housing shortage ended with the departure of the crowd that had filled Bethlehem for the census, and so St. Joseph was able to get a house. The Magi entered, and “they found the Child with Mary His Mother.” The new-born King was enthroned in His Mother’s arms, and the Magi bowed down before Him in deepest reverence, offering Him the precious gifts that they had brought from their far-away country.

Warned in a dream not to return to Herod, the Magi took a different route back to their own country. Probably they went round the southern end of the Dead Sea and escaped into the Syrian Desert.

When the Magi did not return, Herod showed his mind. He had said he would go and worship the Child. He sent his soldiers to kill every male child up to two years of age in Bethlehem and the neighbourhood. Two years was, no doubt, a wide margin on the time since the Magi said the star had first been seen. Herod would take no risks.

Herod’s savage endeavour to destroy the King he thought was a rival to his own power was frustrated. The Holy Family were already refugees in Egypt when Herod once more shed the blood of his people in yet another endeavour to destroy any possible threat to his throne.

The Festival of the Epiphany, of the Manifestation of the Saviour to the Gentile world, is celebrated by the Church with great solemnity. It is, indeed, our festival; for almost all the members of the Church belong to the non-Jewish, or

Gentile, races. We rejoice, then, that the gates of the Church were thrown wide open to the world and that we have access to all the blessings stored for us in the Church of Christ Our Lord, the source of every grace. The Magi were the first Gentiles to come to Christ. After them has come a countless throng—"a great multitude that no man can number, from every nation, and tribe, and people, and tongue" (Apoc. 7/9).

If we look closely at the Magi who appear in the Cribs in our churches we shall generally find that one of them is white, one coal-black, and the third something in between. One is also generally represented as young, one as old, and one is middle-aged. This is meant to teach us that Our Lord is Saviour of all mankind—of every race and every age.

One other thing may be noted. The Magi "found the Child with Mary His Mother." That is where we shall find Him, too. The true Christ is not some vague idea—He had a real human nature, so real that He was born into this world of a human Mother. He is one of our race, one of us, through Mary.

*"Through all the ages,  
Throned upon thy knee,  
Mother-Maid, the Almighty  
Child and Lord we see."*

SUNDAY WITHIN THE OCTAVE OF THE EPIPHANY  
FEAST OF THE HOLY FAMILY

Gospel: St. Luke 2/42-52.

"He Was subject to Them."

No doubt this passage from St. Luke's gospel was chosen for today's Feast mainly because of the last two verses, which sum up the life of Jesus in Nazareth. However, the whole incident portrays the attachment of Mary and Joseph to the Child Jesus and their care and concern for Him, thus providing an example to all parents.

When Jesus was twelve years old the Holy Family went up to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. After the Festival, the Boy stayed behind in the city, while Mary and Joseph set out with the other Nazareth pilgrims on the return journey. They were both under the impression that Jesus was with relatives or friends in the group. Only when camp was pitched for the night did they discover that He was missing. Filled with great anxiety and concern they returned the next day to Jerusalem and searched for the lost Child. Only on the third day did they find Him—in the Temple.

The scene that met their gaze filled them with astonishment. The Boy Jesus was seated in the midst of a group of teachers who were experts in the Law of Moses, just as though He were one of them. He was listening to them and asking them questions. The learned men around Him were obviously filled with amazement at the searching nature of these questions and also at the replies that He gave as they asked Him questions in their turn. Indeed, everybody present was listening spellbound. Never had they heard anyone, let alone a boy of twelve, speak with such wisdom before!

Finally, Our Lady went up to Jesus and asked for an explanation of His remaining behind in Jerusalem: "My child, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been looking for you in great distress." The reply of the twelve-year-old Boy again manifested His marvellous mind: "Why did you look for me? Did you not know that I must needs be in my Father's House?"

This reply, first of all, indicates that the long search was not necessary. Where would Jesus be found but in the Temple, the House of His Father?

Then, these very words, "my Father's House," go deeper. Jesus reminds His Blessed Mother that she is His only human parent, although St. Joseph was quite naturally called "Father" in the home and before others. But, in fact, as Mary knew, the true and only Father of Jesus was God.

Finally, He said that He must be in His Father's House. That is, He had come into this world to do His Father's will and to carry out a special work, the Redemption of the world. Already He was beginning that work—no doubt by preparing the minds of the learned men of Israel for His manifestation of Himself in later years.

This was the answer of the Boy to Mary's question why He had caused so much distress to those who loved Him. It was, in itself, a complete explanation, but neither Mary nor St. Joseph understood it at the time. Often and often Mary thought over that reply, and she came to see, especially in the light of Calvary, that her relation to Jesus had to

involve her in suffering. He had a work to do, and the very character of that work, involving as it did His Passion and death, would bring pain and sorrow to one so near to Him and so intimately associated in His work as Mary was.

This answer was, indeed, a deep one!

However, the time for completing His mission was not yet come, so Jesus returned to Nazareth with Mary and Joseph “and was subject to them.” In Nazareth He grew up, and His wisdom manifested itself still more with the passing years.

In this mystery, then, we learn from Our Lord that God’s will is supreme. In every human life it must come before even the closest of natural ties. In giving Himself so young to the work He had come to do, He vindicated the right of children to leave father and mother in order to answer the call of God. The vocation of a son or daughter may cause pain and sorrow to parents, but such sorrow turns to joy when the will of God is gladly accepted. Children who dedicate their lives to God’s service bring rich blessings on their parents as well as on themselves; but all this may be understood only with the passing of the years.

Happy will that family be which recognizes in practice the fact that the first and gravest duty of each member of the family is to do God’s will.

## SECOND SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

Gospel: St. John 2/1-11.

”There was a Marriage at Cana of Galilee.”

The Feast of the Epiphany recalled the manifestation of the Saviour to the Gentiles. The gospels of the Sundays following the Epiphany continue this theme. In today’s gospel we read that Jesus “manifested His glory” at Cana by turning water into wine. That is, His miraculous power showed that He was the promised Saviour of the world.

The most significant thing about this miracle is that it was worked at Our Lady’s request. Indeed, Jesus seemed to refuse to do anything about the shortage of wine, because His “hour had not yet come.” That is, it was too soon for Him to manifest His glory. Yet, by her order to the waiters Our Lady showed that she understood that at her request the hour would be anticipated. Jesus did, in fact, work a miracle for her.

If, then, Mary had not spoken, there would have been no miracle at Cana.

This brings out the fact that in God’s plans Mary was meant to play an important part in the work of Redemption. Indeed, the very term of address used by Our Lord —“Woman” indicates this, because it recalls the prophecy of salvation made in the Garden of Eden: “I will put enmity between thee and the Woman, between thy seed and Her Seed” (Genesis 3/15). Jesus also addressed His Mother in this way again at the end of His mortal life, when the work of Redemption was practically complete: “Woman, behold thy son.” Thus, His public ministry began with Mary’s prayer and ended in her presence on Calvary.

The nature of this miracle at Cana is also significant. For thousands of years sin had reigned in the world. Then Our Lord came to break its power and to pour out grace and blessing upon mankind. He established a New Order in the world—something as superior to what had gone before as the miraculous wine was superior to the water from which He made it.

This applies to Christian marriage. Our Lord took the natural contract of marriage and made it a means of grace, something of supernatural worth, of value for eternity. Thus, in the Christian order of things, marriage takes on a new dignity and meaning. The partners are caught up into a nobler scheme of things; for they are to co-operate in multiplying the children of God, thus giving increase and growth to the Mystical Body of Christ Our Lord.

When Mary blesses a marriage by her solicitous presence and Jesus raises it to the supernatural order by His grace, a union is formed that should be fruitful for time and eternity.

## THIRD SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

Gospel: St. Matthew 8/1-13.

”If You Want To, You Can Heal Me.”

In this passage we see Our Lord manifesting His power over disease, first over leprosy, then over paralysis.

After the Sermon on the Mount great crowds followed Our Lord, but the cure of this leper seems to have taken place in private. St. Luke, who was a doctor and knew something about diseases, tells us that the man was “full of

leprosy” (5/12). Strictly, the poor fellow should not have approached Jesus at all. Lepers were outcasts, bound to live apart, and if anyone chanced to come towards them they had to give a warning cry: “Unclean! Unclean!”

But this poor leper, moved by a great faith and a desperate hope, came right up to Our Lord. In a gesture in which reverence and respect mingled with earnest appeal, he flung himself on his face before Jesus. “Lord,” he said, “if you want to, you can heal me.” Everyone shrank from the slightest contact with a leper, but Our Lord, the Divine Physician of all human ills, stretched out His hand and touched the leprous skin. “Yes,” He said, “I am willing to heal you.” Then He gave the word of command: “Be cleansed.” As Our Lord spoke, the man who had been “full of leprosy” suddenly ceased to be a leper. Leprosy, one of the most difficult of all diseases to cure, at the order of Jesus immediately fled from this man’s system and he was perfectly healthy again.

Our Lord warned the man that although he had been cured in such a wonderful way, he must still observe the regulations of the Law of Moses and show himself to a priest and offer the purification sacrifice. This showed Our Lord’s respect for the Law, which was still in force, and it also gave the Jewish officials testimony of His power.

When Jesus ordered the man to “tell no one,” He meant: “Do not publish this fact.” But the poor fellow was so overjoyed that he broadcast the miracle, with the consequence that Our Lord could no longer enter a city in daylight (Mark 1/45).

The ills of the body represent the deeper sickness that Our Lord came to cure: sin.

Indeed, the dread disease of leprosy, pervading and corrupting the whole body, gives us one of the most striking pictures of the evil of sin. A soul in mortal sin is like the outcast leper. It has no right to come to the Holy Table where the children of God are fed with the Bread of Life. If it wishes to be cleansed, it must first go and show itself to the priest, to whom Our Lord has given power to heal the leprosy of sin. Humble repentance wins immediate restoration to spiritual health and the right to receive once more the Sacred Body of Our Lord, which will nourish and strengthen the soul, so that it may not relapse into that evil state that is really worse than that of a man “full of leprosy.”

The second miracle in today’s gospel is the cure of the Roman officer’s servant, who was paralysed and suffering very much. Jesus offered to go to the sick man and cure him, but the officer protested. “Lord,” he said, “I am not worthy to receive you under my roof. Just say the word, and my servant will be healed.” The Roman officer went on to explain his mind. As a subordinate officer he was subject to higher authority, but he also had men under him.

He knew perfectly well, therefore, what the exercise of authority means. It is as simple as saying to a man in the ranks: “Go,” and the man promptly goes. Well, Jesus is clearly possessed of supreme authority over disease, so all that He need do is “say the word” (of command), and what He wants done will certainly be done.

This was very great faith, and it was manifested by a “pagan” Roman. Jesus showed His amazement at such faith, and turning to the crowd He said, “I tell you, I have not found such great faith in Israel” —that is, among the Chosen People of God, to whom He had been sent.

Then Our Lord looked into the future, and He saw how faith in Him would spring up beyond the narrow boundaries of Palestine and spread throughout the world. Men from East and West would enter His Church and would receive the blessings promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, while the ‘children of the Kingdom’—the Jews, who were promised these blessings if they were obedient to God’s will would, through their own fault, lose them.

Turning again to the Roman officer, Jesus told him to go—his faith would have its reward. At the word of command from Our Lord the officer’s servant was immediately cured, although he was some distance away.

This Roman officer has given us Christians an example of faith and humility. We should try to realize the greatness of Our Lord and His power, which is no less now than during His life in this world. On the other hand, we need to understand our own nothingness and our dependence on Him for everything that really matters.

The Church has taken up and adapted the Roman officer’s words, putting them on the lips of the priest when he is about to receive Communion: “Lord, I am not worthy that You should come beneath my roof. Only give the word (of command) and my soul shall be healed.” Turning to the people for their Communion, the priest repeats these words. This is a solemn warning to us. None of us can ever be worthy of so great a Gift, but we should try to realize how great and how wonderful Holy Communion really is, and so we should try to prepare ourselves as well as possible for it. If, like the Roman officer, we have faith and humility, then we can receive the blessing of Our Lord and all the rich graces that He brought into this world for our salvation and sanctification.

## FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

Gospel: St. Matthew 8/23-27.

”Even the Winds and the Sea Obey Him.”

This Sunday Our Lord manifests His power over nature—over the blind forces of wind and wave.

After a hard day’s work preaching the Gospel, Jesus took a boat in order to cross to the Eastern side of the Lake of Galilee.

There He could more easily be alone with His disciples. The Apostles managed the boat, but Our Lord, tired out, fell asleep. Whilst He slept, a sudden storm swept down upon the Lake, and the waves rose and were beating into the boat. The Apostles had not yet realized that Jesus was truly God as well as truly man, so they had still to learn that they were safe with Him—even when He was asleep! They strove to keep the boat afloat and on its course, but soon they lost confidence as the waves rose ever higher. Filled with fear, they woke Jesus with the cry: “Lord, save us! We are lost!” Jesus first reproached them for their fear and their lack of faith, then He stood up in the tossing boat and faced the storm. Calmly, confidently, He rebuked the violent wind and spoke sternly to the waves. Then a strange thing happened. The storm died away. The waves ceased their attack on the boat, and the sea grew perfectly calm.

The Apostles had seen Jesus heal the sick and cast out devils, but it was something new and astonishing to see Him call the elements to order as a master might call to order his unruly servants. The Apostles looked at one another in awe and wonder. “What sort of man is this—even the winds and the sea obey Him!”

Yes, this Man had power that no other man has ever had. He had the power of God, for He was God. He made the world and all its elements, “and without Him was made nothing that was made” (John 1/3). The wind and the water are His creatures, and they must obey Him as their true Lord and Master.

Man is different. He has been given the great and wonderful gift of free-will, by which he can choose to serve God or not. In a state of trial, he may be tossed by the waves of various temptations. Jesus may seem to be asleep, but His power remains at our disposal. We have only to pray: “Lord, save us, or we are lost.” At His word the storm will cease.

## FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

Gospel: St. Matthew 13/24-30.

The Great Harvest

In the time of Our Lord the Jews had a wrong idea of the Kingdom that God had promised to establish among them. They expected a political kingdom with a king that would make them rulers of the world. This was a complete mistake. Our Lord came to found a spiritual Kingdom in order to save men’s souls and bring them to eternal life in another and better world.

In an endeavour to correct the ideas of the Jews Our Lord told them various little stories or “parables” about the Kingdom.

The stories were natural enough, but they had a spiritual meaning. If the Jews thought over these stories they would begin to see their mistake about the Kingdom.

The Gospel passages read on the next three Sundays all contain parables.

The story in today’s Mass is about a farmer who put good grain in his field, only to find, when the crop was ripening, that an enemy had over-sown the field with cockle. This weed looks very much like wheat until it is well grown, but then it cannot be rooted out without harming the crop itself. That is why the farmer would not allow his servants to take immediate action. They must wait till the harvest. Then the reapers can cut the good grain, because it grows taller, and leave the noxious weed to be gathered up and burnt.

The explanation of this little story is not read in the Mass. We find it further on in St. Matthew’s gospel (13/36-43).

Our Lord explained to the Apostles that He is the sower who sows good seed—the Gospel—in the field of the world. The bad seed is sown by the devil. The good crop represents the fruit of the good ‘ seed, the true members of God’s Kingdom upon earth. The weeds represent the children of the devil: those who do evil. The harvest is the end of the world, when Our Lord’s angels will gather the good into their Father’s Kingdom, there to shine like the sun for evermore. The wicked, on the other hand, must suffer the fate of the noxious weeds.

Here is an answer to the strange and puzzling spectacle that life presents. We could easily arrange, if we had God's almighty power, a world that we would consider better. Yet, God is Wisdom itself, and He permits evil to exist in this world. Why? Our Lord answers, in effect: "Do not worry. The world seems a strange one, but everything will be straightened out later. Only wait and trust. You will see that all the good will be separated from the wicked, completely and finally. The wicked will suffer a dreadful fate, but the good will be safe with My Father."

That is the final solution to the problem of life. No answer concerned merely with our happiness or unhappiness in this world would be final. It is our state in the world to come that matters.

Our Lord, then, teaches us to look beyond the chaos of this world and to see God watching over His own faithful souls. He can distinguish them, without fail. For them He has prepared a Kingdom of everlasting glory where they will "shine like the sun." No evil can ever enter there; for all evil shall be cast for ever into the concentration camp of unrepented wickedness. In our Father's Kingdom there is only peace, joy, truth, and love, without end. This is a most consoling prospect.

As far as life in this world is concerned, the good may turn to evil, the wicked may be converted and become holy. Holy people have fallen into sin, while sinners have turned into saints. Remember the Good Thief, St. Mary Magdalen, St. Augustine, and so many more. Thus, the wheat and the cockle grow side by side, and there is no final separation while life lasts, because at any moment the sinner may be converted and turn to God. Only at death is our everlasting lot decided. What we are at that moment, that we shall be at the Last Judgment and for ever. There are only two possibilities: to be gathered into Our Father's granary or to be cast into the fire, like harmful weeds. If, then, there is anything that we can do to persuade others to give up evil and pledge themselves to love and serve Our Lord, we should be eager to do it. On the other hand, we must always be on our guard lest the evil around us take root in our own heart and turn us away from the God that loves us.

Indeed, in the heart of everyone of us some cockle grows along with the wheat. It should be the aim of our life to destroy all the cockle and to develop the wheat to the fullest. If we do not do this, then the fire of Purgatory will find something in us that must be consumed before we can enter Our Father's glorious home.

It is better to get rid of all the cockle now.

## SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

Gospel: St. Matthew 13/31-35

### Kingdom Parables

These five verses from St. Matthew's Gospel contain two short parables and a comment on Our Lord's method of teaching.

Each parable deals with an aspect of Our Lord's Kingdom—that is, of the Church which He was establishing in the world.

The first parable is that of the Mustard Seed. So small was this seed that the Jewish Rabbis made the comparison: "As tiny as a mustard seed." In Our Lord's little story a man plants one of these very, very small seeds in his field. In time it grows, and when it has reached its full development it is bigger than any garden plant and is really entitled to be called a tree. This is shown by the fact that wild birds come and settle in its branches.

Here Our Lord is expressing the great difference between the beginnings of the Church and its future development in the world. Just as the tiny mustard seed grows into a tree, so will the Church grow from a very small number of members into a great organization that will seem out of all proportion to its beginnings.

The Church did, as we know, begin in a very humble way. Our Lord Himself, its Founder, wandered about Palestine preaching and teaching, oftentimes with nowhere to lay His head (Mt. 8/20). The few men He chose to carry on His work were mostly poor and unlearned. After the Ascension St. Luke says that "about a hundred and twenty" disciples were gathered together (Acts 1/15). On Pentecost Sunday three thousand converts were made (Acts 2/41). Later, "the number of men grew to about five thousand" (Act 4/4). From Palestine the Church spread through the Roman Empire, and within a few years of Our Lord's death it was to be found over a wide area of the known world. In the course of time the Church gathered men of all nations into her fold—civilized and barbarian, black and white, from the tropics of Africa and America to the Arctic Circle. This vast development far exceeded the natural ex-

pectations of men who judged only by appearances.

Perhaps Our Lord directed this parable against the false ideas current among the Jews in His time. They expected that the Kingdom of the Messiah would begin in some magnificent and astonishing way, and they were uneasy at the very modest way in which Our Lord sought to found the Kingdom. They wanted something spectacular (Mark 8/11). By means of this parable Our Lord taught the people that the Church would, indeed, grow into something great, although its beginnings were so slight.

What would make the Church grow, Our Lord did not explain here, but in another parable (Mark 4/26-29) He made it clear that His Church grows because of the vital energy in it—the Divine principle of life in the Church.

The second parable in today's Gospel is very brief: "The Kingdom of Heaven is like yeast which a woman took and mixed with three measures of flour until it had all risen." This parable is generally known as The Leaven, but the idea is expressed for our minds by the yeast that makes bread rise.

The point of comparison here is the fact that the entire quantity of dough is affected by the action of the yeast, which penetrates and transforms it. In a similar way the Church works her way through the whole world, 'transforming all who come into vital contact with her.

This is true of each individual soul, of families, cities, and nations. Christianity makes a new thing wherever it is allowed to work. The Christian is very different from a pagan who has no vital contact with the Church. A Christian family is very different from a non-Christian family, and this is true of larger groups and even of whole States and peoples. Christianity transforms men. It makes, as St. Paul said, "a new man"—one "created after the image of God in the justice and holiness that come from truth" (Ephesians 4/24).

It is clear that Our Lord never thought of religion as a merely external thing, to be put on for special occasions, like our best clothes. To Him it was a vital energy working in our whole lives, penetrating and transforming us. If this is not happening, there is something wrong somewhere.

St Matthew adds that Our Lord taught the people in parables. This method of teaching, he says, fulfilled the prophecy (of Psalm 77/2)

*"I will open my mouth in parables,  
I will utter things hidden since the world was made."*

Through His parables Our Lord was teaching the people the mysteries of His Kingdom, truths reserved till His coming. The parable form of teaching was suited to Our Lord's purpose, because He always started from something that the people knew from their own experience. This gave them a basis for understanding something of which they had no experience—the Church, its nature, its work in men's souls, its work in the world. Some of the people would understand more, others less, but Our Lord's method was that of the good teacher: He tried to lead the people on from what they knew to what He wished them to learn—to lead them from the material and visible world of everyday life to the invisible and spiritual realities of the Kingdom of God on earth.

Nihil Obstat  
PERCY JONES  
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