

# EP THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. 25 MARK 4

**W**e begin this lesson by jumping ahead in our reading. Because the majority of this chapter consists of Jesus' parables, we will first look at His reasons for using parables. The attitude of the people who heard Jesus' teaching is a significant reason for His use of parables: the Disciples were eager to know the things of God, whereas most of the crowd was only interested in the excitement and novelty of a miracle-worker. The Disciples thus asked to understand the parable. Blessed Theophylact says, "It is given to those who ask. For the Lord says, 'Ask, and it shall be given you' (Matthew 7:7; Luke 11:9). But the others, the Lord has blinded lest it be to their greater condemnation that they should understand what they ought to do, and yet not do it." The majority of the crowd had hearts that were hardened toward really drawing close to God (as is indicated in Jesus' quote of Isaiah 6:9-10), and thus they were not open to learning the teachings in the parables.

The Parable of the Sower (vv. 3-9, 13-20) explains how a person's spiritual health determines whether he or she accepts or rejects the Word of God. St. Cyril of Alexandria, a fifth century Christian, explains the importance of the fruit borne by people who receive the Word: "As the most learned Paul writes: 'Everyone has his proper gift from God,' one after this manner, another after that (1 Corinthians 7:7). And we don't find the good actions of holy men to be all of equal merit. But it behooves us to strive earnestly after their better actions, and rise above the less worthy; so shall we be rewarded bountifully by Christ."

This understanding of the parable is reinforced by the Parable of the Lamps (vv. 21-25), in which Jesus talks about

illuminating the world with the light of the Gospel (see also Matthew 5:14-16). According to St. John Chrysostom, this parable encourages us to engage in "teaching with so pure a light, that men may not only hear your words, but see your works, that those whom as lamps you have enlightened by the word...For by those teachers who do as well as teach, God is magnified."

In this chapter St. Mark includes two more parables of spiritual growth. The Parable of the Scattered Seed (vv. 26-29) teaches us two things. First, according to such saints as St. Ambrose of Milan and St. John Chrysostom, our spiritual growth is directly caused by the grace of God. Second, as Blessed Theophylact teaches, the parable outlines the life of spiritual growth: as infants we are like young leaves; as we become able to resist temptations we are like the ears of fruit; and finally we are like the full-grown plant when we are mature in our faith and relationship with God. This process is reinforced by the Parable of the Mustard Seed (vv. 30-32): our faith and spiritual lives start small, but can grow mightily (many scholars also believe the parable refers to the growth of the Church).

Jesus' calming the storm by rebuking the powers of nature (vv. 35-41) demonstrates His divinity and authority. We learn from St. Mark that, in the words of the St. Athanasius the Great, "The Lord Who rebuked (the storm) was not a creature, but rather its Creator." St. Basil the Great further teaches us that "by these encounters we are meeting the Father of the Son, the Father Who creates through the Son."

## A QUICK TIP FOR YOUR LIFE

### SEED

Regarding the Parable of the Sower, St. Theophan the Recluse encourages every Christian to "judge for himself as to which category he belongs."

Are you inattentive to God's revelation to us in Holy Scripture, or to the teaching and Mysteries of the Church? Do you allow your concern for success and material things to distract you from the things of God?

Or is the word of God planted deep in your heart, enabling you to live as a light that shines God's glory to others?

Give your attention — and your life — to the things that really matter.

