

## MATTHEW CHAPTER THIRTEEN NOTES

Facing mounting opposition, Jesus begins to teach His followers in parables, a story form understood more readily by those who have faith. They each describe a particular aspect of the nature of the Kingdom of God that Jesus is inaugurating. What shall this kingdom be like, established by this itinerant rabbi from Galilee heralded by his cousin John in the wilderness? The prophecies of old are beginning to be fulfilled, one cascading right after another, but who will have “eyes to see and ears to hear”?<sup>1</sup> Will we remain blind and deaf in our age as well? When the Son of Man returns, will He find faith on earth?”<sup>2</sup> The Salvation History story remains open ended, and you are a part of it.

### Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23-- Parable of the Sower

St Ignatius in his *Spiritual Exercises* says to “pray for the grace to know Jesus more intimately, to love him more intensely, and to follow him more closely.”<sup>3</sup> What distracts or impedes your growth in faith or chokes out the life of God in you? What counter strategy can you implement? (For example, many saints have adopted the stance of doing the opposite of the vice or obstacle against which they struggled. If wealth is an issue, they give it away generously. If the consuming desire for the praise of others becomes a vice, they intentionally humble themselves and do hidden deeds, serving in obscurity or poverty). \_\_\_\_\_

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What four types of people are represented by the hard, rocky, thorny, and good soil? Which one are you? \_\_\_\_\_

*Geographical Note:* West of Lake Galilee (where Jesus delivered these parables) was a plain that has rock soil, innumerable rural paths, thorn bushes, and small rivers that frequently dried up, leaving parched soil in its wake. Jesus always used details familiar with His listeners.

### Matthew 13:10-17, 34-35-- Why Parables?

Why do you think Jesus used parables at this time of his public ministry? When has He spoken to you in a particular way, to reach you, taking into consideration where you were in your faith development? \_\_\_\_\_

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“In his preaching Jesus takes account of the different outlooks of his listeners, as can be seen in the attitudes described in the parable of the sower. If people were well disposed to him, the enigmatic nature of the parable would stimulate their interest; and Jesus later did give his many disciples a fuller explanation of its meaning; but there was no point in doing this if people were not ready to listen.

On Jesus’ lips parables were exceptionally effective. By using parables he keeps his listeners’ attention, whether they are uneducated or not, and by means of the most ordinary

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 6:10; Jeremiah 5:21; Ezekiel 12:2; Matthew 13:15

<sup>2</sup> Luke 18:8.

<sup>3</sup> O’Brien, Kevin, SJ. *The Ignatian Adventure*. (c) 2011 by Loyola Press, Chicago, pp 163.

things of daily life he sheds light on the deepest supernatural mysteries. His parables are quite unique; they carry the seal of his personality; through them he has graphically shown us the riches of grace, the life of the Church, the demands of the faith and even the mystery of God's own inner life."<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, "many parables are strange and initially off-putting and puzzling. Of course, that is the point of parables: to bother us, throw us off base, confuse us a bit. How characteristic this was of Jesus' preaching! He rarely lays things out in doctrinal form: he prefers to tell these puzzling, funny stories. Why? Because in many cases, stories reveal truth that arguments can't quite capture."<sup>5</sup>

Does Matt 13:12 seem unfair to you? How have you experienced the dynamic that when you respond to grace you are generously given additional grace so that you are able to steadily grow in holiness? How has the opposite dynamic worked in your life, namely, the more you resist grace, the further you move from God? \_\_\_\_\_

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How does Jesus quote Isaiah in Matt 13:14-15 to show that God will punish those who with hardened hearts resist grace? \_\_\_\_\_

### **Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43-- Parable of the Weeds**

What is the lesson of this parable? \_\_\_\_\_

"The Church Fathers correctly saw this weed-strewn field as an image of the Catholic Church. There are many hypocrites and insincere persons mixed into the visible Church in every age. In fact, it often seems that the hypocrites are more noticeable than true believers just as weeds often stand straight and tall whereas ripe wheat often bends over due to its heavy ear of grain. So the weeds in a wheat field are more prominent than the wheat itself. It would be a mistake, however, to think that the Church was not the kingdom of heaven simply because hypocrites are mixed into the crop. Many Christians through the ages have broken with the Church, offended that there were sinful people within it. Various self-appointed 'reformers' have broken off and attempted to establish 'pure' or 'sifted' churches, but this will not be accomplished until the final judgment. That is not to say there isn't a time and place to excommunicate someone who publically flaunts the teachings of Scripture and the Church (see 1 Corinthians 5:9-13). Sadly, that's sometimes necessary. But only God can remove the hypocritical and insincere who don't call public attention to themselves."<sup>6</sup>

This parable is interesting taking into context Jesus meeting every increasing opposition from the religious leaders. "God sows his good seed, his word, his love, and compassion, but his project is met with opposition. And the evil is such that it insinuates itself right into the very

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<sup>4</sup> *The Navarre Bible: St Matthew*. (c) 1998 by Four Courts Press, Dublin, Ireland, pp 127-128.

<sup>5</sup> Barron, Bishop Barron. *Daily Gospel Reflections*: July 21, 2022: Matthew 13:10-17. Accessed online from Word on Fire at [wof@wordonfire.org](mailto:wof@wordonfire.org).

<sup>6</sup> Bergsma, John. *New Testament Basics for Catholics*. (c) 2015 by Ave Maria Press, Notre Dame, IN, pp 46.

fabric of the good. Just as a parasite lives off a healthy body (and thereby weakens it), so moral evil lives off of the good soul, the good society, the good Church (and thereby weakens them).

What is the result? That it is exceptionally difficult to extricate the evil from the good without damaging the good. That's why it is extremely difficult-and often counterproductive—to go after these evils with a crusading spirit. To be sure, there are certain evils that have to be addressed—right now, no questions, no hesitations. But there are other evils (and they are really evil) that are best left alone for the time being, lest more damage is done in the process of extricating them.”<sup>7</sup>

*Note: Jewish symbolism:* The “harvest” was an Old Testament word implying the final judgment of God.

*Agricultural Note:* Cockle is a weed that “can easily be mistaken for wheat until the ear appears. If it gets ground up with wheat it contaminates the flour and any bread made from that flour causes severe nausea when eaten. In the East personal vengeance sometimes took the form of sowing cockle among the enemies’ wheat. Roman law prescribed penalties for this crime.”<sup>8</sup>

### **Matthew 13:31-32- Parable of the Mustard Seed**

How much faith do you have? More or less than last year? (We never stay static in the spiritual life; always advancing forward or retreating). \_\_\_\_\_

“Jesus tells us in Luke 17:5-10 that if we had faith the size of a mustard seed, we could uproot a mulberry tree and plant it in the sea. What is being communicated here is something simple: faith is power. When our lives are aligned to God, we become conduits of enormous power.

Attachments block us and break this flow. An attachment is anything that you convince yourself you cannot live without. This idea is central to the spirituality of St Ignatius of Loyola. What are the attachments that block the divine power from flowing through us? Wealth, pleasure, honor, power.

Look at the one (Jesus) that we hold up as the model of power. Notice please how comfortable he looks; notice how many ‘nice things’ he has around him. And remark how popular he is, how everyone is singing his praises. And notice how successful he is, what a brilliant career he’s had!

Love what Jesus loved on the cross, and despise what he despised, said Thomas Aquinas. That is the key to a spiritually successful life and to the unleashing of divine power.”<sup>9</sup>

The kingdom starts small, like the smallest of seeds grows into an “enormous bush. This is like the Church, starting with the death of a single man, Jesus of Nazareth, and growing into the world’s largest institution of 1.2 billion, as the mother of hospitals, schools, and universities, and as the world’s teacher and conscience. Even when the Church is publically rejected or

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<sup>7</sup> Barron, Bishop Barron. *Daily Gospel Reflections*: July 23, 2022: Matthew 13:24-30. Accessed online from Word on Fire at [wof@wordonfire.org](mailto:wof@wordonfire.org).

<sup>8</sup> *The Navarre Bible*: St Matthew, pp 132.

<sup>9</sup> Barron, Bishop Robert. *Daily Gospel Reflections*: October 2, 2022: Luke 17:5-10. Accessed from Word on Fire at [wof@wordonfire.org](mailto:wof@wordonfire.org).

persecuted, ideas such as human dignity, care for the poor, forgiveness of offenders, and human rights come from the Gospel. They spread in a culture, but many don't even realize these are the effects of the Church."<sup>10</sup> What hospital, school, or university that is Catholic has had an influence on you? \_\_\_\_\_

### **Matthew 13:33-Parable of the Yeast**

What small beginning in a ministry or work of God have you seen flourish into something quite astounding? \_\_\_\_\_

Examine your life and work today. What might God be using as Kingdom yeast? \_\_\_\_\_

*Cultural note:* "Three measures would provide bread for more than a hundred people; so, the kingdom, though small when planted, will penetrate and expand to give life and spiritual food to many."<sup>11</sup>

### **Matthew 13: 44-46—Parable of the Treasure and Pearls**

Do you treasure your faith in Christ? Is He worth everything to you? Why or why not?

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"Let's focus on the first parable here (of the treasure). Sometimes God's love is found that way. There's a saying, 'Life is what happens to you while you're busy making other plans.' Sometimes in the course of our everyday lives, something happens that vividly and surprisingly summons us to union with God. We realize, in a flash, what it's all about. We weren't particularly looking for it, but it found us. That's what Jesus is getting at. As you walk through the fields of life, be open to the inrushing of grace when you least expect it. And when it comes, give up anything that holds it back."<sup>12</sup>

When have you been "surprised by the inrushing of grace" or a flash of insight (theophany)? How do you respond? \_\_\_\_\_

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"Pray to be ever ready for God's will even when it takes you by surprise" - St Mary MacKillop.<sup>13</sup>

St Gregory the Great once wrote in a homily on this passage: "In these two parables Jesus shows the supreme value of the Kingdom of heaven, and the attitude people need if they are to attain it. The parables are very alike, but it is interesting to note the differences: the treasure means abundance of gifts; the pearl indicates the beauty of the kingdom. The treasure is something stumbled upon; the pearl, the result of a lengthy search; but in both instances the finder is filled with joy."<sup>14</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Bergsma, pp 46-47.

<sup>11</sup> Cavins, Jeff and Sarah Christmyer. *The Great Adventure: Matthew: The King and His Kingdom*. (c) 2019 by Ascension Press, West Chester, PA, pp 219.

<sup>12</sup> Barron, Bishop Robert. *Daily Gospel Reflections*: July 31, 2019: Memorial of Saint Ignatius of Loyola: Matthew 13:44-46. Accessed from Word on Fire at [wof@wordonfire.org](http://wof@wordonfire.org).

<sup>13</sup> E-Spirations published daily by Franciscan University Steubenville Conferences, December 6, 2022. Accessed from [webmaster@steubenville.org](mailto:webmaster@steubenville.org).

<sup>14</sup> St Gregory the Great, *In Evangelia homiliae*, 11—quoted in *The Navarre Bible: St Matthew*, pp 136.

*Allegorical Interpretation:* According to St Irenaeus, “Christ himself is the great treasure hidden within the field of the Old Testament Scripture. Only in light of his Cross and Resurrection can the mysteries of the Old be fully understood to announce the advent of God’s Son.”<sup>15</sup>

### **Matthew 13:47-50—Parable of the Haul of Fish**

What will happen at the final judgment? \_\_\_\_\_

### **Matthew 13:51-53—Jesus Reconciling the Old and New Covenants**

Why might Jesus include these remarks to the future builders of the Church within a future who would find themselves within a hostile Jewish climate? \_\_\_\_\_

“Jesus knew that his ministry and teaching were, to a large extent, in continuity with what came before him. At the same time, he knew that his preaching and person did represent something new and unprecedented. So those learned in the kingdom of God love traditions, the heritage of faith; and those learned in the kingdom also know that the Spirit is doing new things. Therefore, we have to be open to what he might want to show us.”<sup>16</sup>

### **Summary:**

The Kingdom of God is unexpected, often hidden, and many do not recognize it. “The Catholic Church asserts that the kingdom has come, and it is present already in the Church. Everyone else scoffs at this: How can the Church be the kingdom? It’s full of bad fish. It has weeds all through it. In some places, it’s as small as a mustard seed or as hidden as yeast in dough. It’s just an empty ordinary field like any other. It doesn’t look any different than these faux pearls to us! But Jesus told us it would be this way. The visible Church will always appear contemptible to people without faith. Nonetheless, inside it, the kingdom of God is already present because Jesus the King lives in His Church.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> *Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Gospel of Matthew*, with Commentary, Notes, & Study Questions by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch. (c) 2000 by Ignatius Press, San Francisco, CA, pp 42.

<sup>16</sup> Barron, Bishop Barron. *Daily Gospel Reflections*: July 28, 2022: Matthew 13:47-53. Accessed online from Word on Fire at [wof@wordonfire.org](mailto:wof@wordonfire.org).

<sup>17</sup> Bergsma, pp 48.