

St. Cyril
On the Gospel

The blessed prophets have spoken in various ways concerning Christ; for they foretold He was the Light that was to come; some proclaimed He was endowed with royal dignity and excellence. And a certain one among them has said: *Blessed is he that hath seed in Sion, and friends in Jerusalem. Behold a king shall reign, and princes have preceded him with judgement. And he shall be a man that hides his words, and he shall hide himself as from water rushing down* (Is. xxxi. 9; xxxii. 1, 2). That the words of the Saviour were for the most part hidden is plain to us. It is so that the psalmist also brings Him speaking before us: *I will open my mouth in parables* (Ps. lxxvii. 2).

Now you may see that what was foretold has come to pass. For a great multitude stood about Him, gathered from all Judea, to whom He spoke, and in parables; but since they were unworthy to understand the mysteries of heaven His words were obscure to them. Neither had they the will to believe in Christ: more, they blasphemously opposed His teaching. And for this reason they also began to denounce those that followed Him, impiously declaring: *He hath a devil, and is mad: why hear you Him?*

Accordingly, it was not *given to them*, to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven; but to us who are ready to believe, it has been given. For he has given us *to understand a parable, and the interpretation; the words of the wise, and their mysterious sayings* (Prov. i. 6). We must also tell you that parables are as it were images, not of visible things, but rather of things of the mind and of the spirit. That which cannot be seen with the eyes of the body, a parable will reveal to the eyes of the mind, informing the subtlety of the intellect by means of things perceivable by the senses, and as it were tangible. Let us see of what kind is the enlightenment the word of the Lord prepares for us.

What is the scope of this parable, and what its hidden profundity aims at, let us learn from the One composing it. For even before our time the blessed Disciples did not grasp its meaning, and they came to the Saviour, asking Him: *What this parable might be?* Let us consider the reason why the seed on the way side was seized. A way side is almost always hard and unbroken, because it is trodden on by the feet of all who pass, and seed is never sown there. Into whosoever therefore that have minds that are hard and unyielding, no divine or sacred word will enter, by whose aid the joyful fruits of virtue might grow. Men of this kind are a highway that is trodden by unclean spirits, and by Satan himself, and they shall never be yielders of holy fruit, because their hearts are sterile and unfruitful.

Again there are others who carry the faith indifferently within them, a faith that is simply a matter of words. They have a religion that is without root; for entering a church they take a delight in seeing so many assembled there, and they readily take part in the sacred mysteries; but they do so from no serious purpose, and from a certain levity of will. And when they go out of the churches such people straightaway consign to forgetfulness the holy teachings. And as long as Christians are left in peace, they keep the faith; but should persecution arise, they will be of a mind to seek safety in flight. To such as these the prophet Jeremiah says: *Prepare ye the shield and buckler, and go forth to battle* (Jer. xlvi. 3). For the hand of the Lord our Defender cannot indeed be overcome; as the most learned Paul says: *God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that which you are able: but will make also with temptation issue, that you may be able to bear it* (I Cor. x. 15).

Yet if it should happen that we must endure suffering for the sake of the religion of Jesus Christ, then in every way and everywhere we are blessed. For the Saviour has said to the holy Apostles: *Be not afraid of them who kill the body, and are not able to kill the soul* (Mt. x. 28). And this lesson He gave us, not by words alone, but by deeds. For He laid down His own life for us, and repurchased all men by His blood. We are therefore not our own possession: we are His Who purchased us, and redeemed us, to Whom we owe our life. For as the holy Paul has said: *To this end Christ died and rose again; that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living* (Rom. xiv. 9).

Let us consider next, what do the thorns mean, by which the divine seed is choked? What does the Saviour say here? For it is He that scatters the seed which, remaining in the ground of the souls of those that receive it, and being absorbed by them, and beginning to put forth shoots, is choked by the cares of this world, and as Jeremiah says, *becomes a bud that shall yield no meal*. *Break up anew*, says another prophet, *your fallow ground, and sow not upon thorns* (Jer. iv. 3). Therefore, that the divine seed may germinate in us, let us first drive forth from our minds all worldly cares.

They are rich and fruitful soil who yield fruit a hundredfold; and good and beautiful are the souls that take deeply into themselves the seeds of the Word, and keep them, and tend them with care. Of these it may be said, as was said by the Lord by the mouth of one of the prophets: *And all nations shall call you blessed: for you shall be a delightful land, saith the Lord of hosts* (Mal. iii. 12). For when the divine word falls upon a soul purified of the things that afflicted it, then it takes deep root, and comes forth as an ear of corn, and yields fruit abundantly.

I consider that this also will profit those seeking what is profitable. For Matthew when also relating this parable tells us, that the good ground brought forth fruit in three different degrees. For he says: *Some brought forth fruit an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, and some thirtyfold* (Mt. xiii. 8). Note that Christ has recounted three ways of disaster, and that three likewise are the grades of glory. For the seed that fell upon the *way side* was seized by the birds. That which sprang up *on stony* ground quickly perished. That which grew amid *the thorns* was choked. But the desirable *good earth* brought forth fruit, and with a threefold difference, as I have said; some *a hundredfold*, some *sixty*, and some *thirtyfold*.

As the most learned Paul writes: *Everyone hath his proper gift from God; one after this manner, another after that* (I Cor. vii. 7). And we do not find the good actions of holy men to be all of equal merit. But it behoves us to strive earnestly after their better actions, and rise above the less worthy: so shall we be rewarded bountifully by Christ, to Whom, with the Father, and the Holy Ghost, be praise and glory for ever. Amen.

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