

Sixth Sunday after Epiphany (Transferred) 2018

Most Beloved in Christ,

Jesus, the living Word of God, draws to Himself the crowds of ordinary men, eager to hear His wisdom. This is an image of the Church which even now He makes His own by grace while incorporating it into Himself and communion with the Holy Trinity.

The works of God follow His providential design for all mankind, and this often upsets our own plans and calculations. Saint Paul points this out to the Thessalonians in the first of His epistles: He emphasizes the success that the preaching of the Gospel has encountered among them. Despite difficulties of all sorts, they were converted in great numbers and the ardor of their faith is everywhere quoted as an example: they were that measure of leaven which God folded into the hearts of men, a mustard seed which grew to great fruition. The fullness of God's work in them was to be found in the beauty and joy of a truly Christian life, the "work of your faith, the labor of your love, the constancy of your hope fixed on Our Lord Jesus Christ."

In this passage Paul has touched on the foundation of Christian perfection: he refers to the three theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity while making "labor" - and by this we need to understand "our daily conduct" - to walk in line with them. For moral behavior - patient and zealous - is the first necessary step in the leaven of God's grace and Church's doctrine carrying through its work properly. Among the converts of Thessalonica and those down through time one can see the Holy Spirit visibly at work, God's effective agent in bringing His providential designs to pass through the instrumentality of His Church, His teaching, and His people's role in both.

With the parables in today's Gospel reading we hear our Lord referring to the growth of a mustard seed and the effect of leaven: the mustard seed grows into a tree which covers the earth, the leaven spreads throughout the mass of dough into which it is folded. These are images of God's divine life brought into this world by Christ and whose effects are spread abroad by His Holy Catholic Church: the parable of the yeast speaks of God's truth in a man's soul, that of the mustard seed of its effect in all of society.

When we say the Church is Catholic, we mean that it has power to convince the individual of divine truths and the power to spread this among all the children of men. The former operation is interior, the latter exterior. The collect of today's Mass refers to this very thing. God,

through Christ, gives His life to the soul which is ready for it. This is God's gift to us, containing, as it does, a supernatural power of transformation. Caught up into the mystery of Jesus, we live out God's providential designs even in spite of ourselves. Through fidelity to grace, we give evidence of God's kingdom here on earth among men. This is how, despite the great obstacles and difficulties of pagan society Paul's conversions among the Thessalonians were so numerous and influential. This is why the Catholic Church has spread her universal message so far and so wide: the contrast between difficult human situations and the unexpected spiritual results is one of the marks of divine action, characterizing both the life of the Church at large and the personal experience of Christians as individuals.

Faith is simple for those whose purpose is single: for those who are of good will. God's grace is ever ready to help them; but humility, docility and sincerity are needed, for faith is not generated in us by our own efforts. It is, rather, motivated by the power of divine authority: Christ who reveals, and the Church which passes on His revelation, whole, unchanged. But authority is not readily submitted to by the proud, by men who will not believe unless they see. But faith is more meritorious than sight for it rests in a docility and humility of the will, which allows reason to hold as true what is received by the witness of others.

Let us, dear faithful, in this last week before the annual penitential season has its first beginnings take to heart with renewed conviction Christ's call to genuine faith and good works. Let us receive the truth of God's word, whether in the face of great trials or in the midst of spiritual consolations, with docility and confidence in the good God who can neither deceive nor be deceived. Let us submit to Him and to His providential designs, certain of His abiding love for us, while we persevere in setting good examples for others through which the divine light of His truth may draw the world closer to Him. This is what it means to be true Catholic Christians. In so doing the grace of our faith and good works, will, in time draw us into the living presence of God Himself: the vision of Him, face to face, in the majesty of His glory in that truer world for which we have been created and even more wondrously redeemed.