



# FOLLOW ME

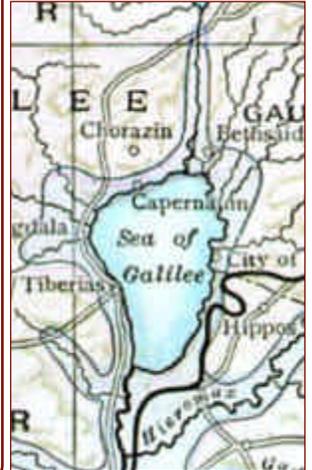
## LESSON SIX: THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. MARK 4



### FAST FACTS

- Jesus taught the people using parables.
- According to the *Parable of the Sower*, the seed of God's word falls by the wayside, on stony ground, among thorns, as well as on good ground.
- The wayside is where Satan easily steals the seed; the stony ground is where love for God dies in tribulation; the thorns are the things of this world distracting the person from God; and the good ground is a heart receptive to God.
- Jesus further taught about spiritual growth with His teaching about a lamp under a bushel, as well as the *Parable of the Scattered Seed* and the *Mustard Seed*.
- Jesus had the authority to control the forces of nature.

### MAP



## MARK 4:10-12, 33-34

We 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."

Fr. Paul Tarazi further explains this point: "Since a 'parable' presents imagery intended to be comprehensible to anyone...it is intended to communicate a teaching as clearly as possible. If, then, someone does not understand and obey the message it must be a deliberate act, something done *willingly*." 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.

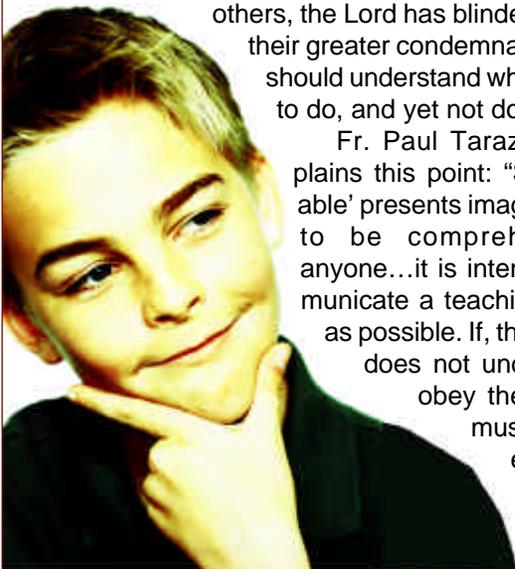
## MARK 4:1-9, 13-32

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. Blessed Theophylact summarizes the meaning of this parable:

*Here are three types of those who destroy the word: the inattentive, who are on the trodden path, preoccupied with pleasing all and sundry; those of little faith, who are among the stones; and the pleasure seekers, who are among the thorns. There are also three types of those who accepted and preserved the seed: those who*

### IT'S IN THE BIBLE

When St. Mark refers to the "mystery of the kingdom of God" (v. 11), the word *mystery* is used in the New Testament to refer to something God reveals to His people. St. Paul refers to his teaching about the Gospel of Jesus Christ as "the revelation of the mystery which was kept secret for long ages" (Romans 16:25), and further refers to the "mystery which is Christ in you" (Colossians 1:26). In the context of St. Mark's Gospel, the mystery is that the kingdom had drawn near in the coming of Christ.



*bear fruit a hundredfold, who lead a life at the pinnacle of perfection; those who bear fruit sixtyfold, who live a life of moderate achievement; and those who bear thirtyfold, who achieve small things, yet they, too, contribute according to their strength.*

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). Ad 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 reference to a lamp (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." St.

Hilary of Poitiers simply stated in the fourth century that we should live so that "our work may shine forth in honour of God to those among whom we live."

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 the fourth century 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).

## LOOK AT YOURSELF

Regarding the Parable of the Sower, St. Theophan the Recluse, a 19<sup>th</sup> century saint, 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?

## OUR FAITH TEACHES

Blessed Augustine links Jesus' calming the storm to His grace in our lives:

*When you have to listen to abuse, that means you are being buffeted by the wind. When your anger is roused, you are being tossed by the waves. So when the winds blow and the waves mount high, the boat is in danger, your heart is imperiled...Christ is asleep in you. What do I mean? I mean you have forgotten His presence. Rouse Him, then; remember Him, let Him keep watch within you, pay heed to Him...A temptation arises: it is the wind. It disturbs you: it is the surging of the sea. This is the moment to awaken Christ and let Him remind you of these words: 'Who can this be? Even the winds and the sea obey Him.'*

## MARK 4:35-41

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."



## WHAT DID I LEARN ABOUT FOLLOWING JESUS?

- According to Jesus, what are some of the obstacles that may hinder my relationship with Him?
- Is my relationship with God a "lamp put under a bushel?"

What can I do to allow God to shine through me?

- What does Jesus' ability to calm the storm teach me about Him? What does Blessed Augustine tell me about asking Jesus to calm the storms in my heart?

