

HOLY MASS ON THE OCCASION OF  
THE FIRST CHARIS GENERAL ASSEMBLY  
(Rome, Mater Ecclesiae College – 31 October 2023)

HOMILY

(Tuesday of the 30th week in Ordinary Time: Rom 8:18-25; Ps 125; Lk 13:18-21)

Dear brothers and sisters,

In every Mass we celebrate, the word of Jesus that we hear in the Gospel helps us to go beyond our narrow human vision. In everything we do, our tendency is to want to be seen, to show ourselves to be efficient, to succeed, and to want to see the result of our efforts immediately! Today, in the Gospel, Jesus tells us to remain hidden, to be patient and not to be led by haste, but to wait with confidence!

Jesus compares the Kingdom of God to two actions, one performed by a man, one performed by a woman. The whole of humanity is represented here: man and woman. Two activities typical of men and women are taken as examples: cultivating a garden and preparing food for the family. These two human activities are in a sense 'taken over' by God to symbolise his work in the world. God too wants to 'plant', and God also wants to 'nourish'. God, by sending his Son, has sown a little seed in the world and a little leaven in the dough of humanity. Jesus' work is a small seed of humble beginnings. It is almost insignificant, being limited in space and time; it involves simple people and it is inconspicuous. It is a little bit of leaven that grows very slowly in the hearts of those who accept God's word.

Yet there appears in the parables an extraordinary, surprising power that can only come from God. Things born of God grow from being small to becoming big! A tiny seed becomes a great tree that welcomes the "birds of the air"; a little yeast ferments "three measures of flour", which

corresponds to more than 50 kilos and would be enough to feed hundreds of people! In the details of the text there are two rich biblical references. The image of the tree on which the birds make their nest is in fact found in various Old Testament prophetic passages to indicate the false power of those ancient kingdoms that claimed to protect the whole of humanity under the shadow of their power (cf. Dan 4:7-20; Ez 31:1-6). These kingdoms fell, however, and their claim to ensure prosperity for humankind vanished. The Prophet Ezekiel, moreover, gives us a passage that has a certain messianic significance. It describes a tree that God will make grow and that will offer dwelling and rest to all birds (Ez 17:22-23). This symbol is fulfilled in Jesus Christ: he is the “seedling” planted by God in human history, the Kingdom that he proclaimed and established with his Resurrection -- the “great tree” that will embrace the whole world and offer shelter to us all. We are fragile and lost like birds in search of a “nest”, that is, a safe place to which we can always return amid the many uncertainties of life.

In the image of the yeast used to ferment “three measures of flour” we also find a biblical reference. It is Abraham who had precisely “three measures of flour” kneaded to offer food to the three angels who visited him (Gen 18:6). This enormous quantity represents Abraham's generous hospitality towards the three mysterious travellers and his faith in believing the divine promise of a son. This gospel parable indicates the superabundance of spiritual goods that God offers to those who accept his Son Jesus in faith. The Kingdom that Jesus unveils is truly a superabundant feast: it offers us reconciliation and mercy, fellowship and peace, serenity and joy.

We learn from these images the divine way of doing things. The seed is buried in the earth and the yeast is hidden in the flour: both become invisible. So too the Kingdom of God is “hidden” and “invisible” in the heart of each individual believer from Baptism onwards; and it remains “hidden” and “invisible” in the heart of human society even when the Christian community is living there. Yet it has the power to bring forth great things in people and society! This is how God does things. God does not impose and does not force things. God loves the small and insignificant; God wants this work of salvation to mature and grow, to work mysteriously ‘from within’, hidden in the hearts of people and society.

This teaches us the importance of patience. A seed needs time to germinate and grow. Yeast needs time to transform the whole mass of flour. At first it almost seems as if they will disappear and die! However, do not despair because little by little they will take effect. In the same way,

patience is needed with God's works. Patience like this is not fatalistic. It is full of faith and surrender to God. It makes us firmly believe that God will slowly bring about a prodigious transformation through the Holy Spirit. Each human person will be renewed and little by little his nature as child of God will appear. Society will be 'fermented' and we will become more and more reconciled and kind to each other. Christians are the seed of eternal life and the leaven of the Kingdom for the world. Jesus acts in us and we receive from Jesus a kind of power that can transform the world. Therefore, we must not become discouraged or try to precipitate things.

We heard something similar in the letter to the Romans: creation groans and suffers... as we wait! These are the groans of childbirth, full of hope. But St Paul assures us that after the sufferings of this moment in time, there will be glory in the future that will be incomparably greater!

Dear brothers and sisters, even within the Catholic Church the Charismatic Renewal began as a small seed. It arose from a small group of young people who experienced a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit during a retreat. Now that small seed has become an abundant 'stream of grace' that has saved the lives of millions. The same applies to CHARIS. This organisation that is of service in all its components, is also just a "seed of the Kingdom" still in its infancy, but the Lord will provide and make it a fruitful tree full of "branches": to share Baptism in the Holy Spirit with everyone in the Church, to serve the unity of the Church and the ecumenical journey, to help the very poor in body and spirit, according to the goals that the Holy Father has indicated for you (cf. Audience to the participants at the CHARIS sponsored meeting on 8 June 2019). In this way CHARIS will serve the good of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal and help many people to find in Jesus and in the Church a safe "nest" to be able to follow their vocation in holiness.

Dear friends, may the Lord always guide your steps and help you to maintain communion in the Holy Spirit and to collaborate joyfully in working towards the growth of God's Kingdom. Amen.