

## **June 14, 2015 The House of the Father Homily**

It has been nearly five years since a close friend of mine passed away, Fr. Anthony Gulley. For many years he distinguished himself as a teacher and shepherd of souls at the College of St. Rose in Albany. His labors earned him the admiration of so many of his former students who, to this very day, have the fondest memories of him. Oddly, though, Fr. Gulley is best remembered for a sermon he preached at a downtown Albany church, St. Mary's, as his long life drew to a close. You may find the story quite fascinating.

After a haircut one afternoon, his barber asked if he would kindly offer the Last rites to a close personal friend, a baptized Catholic. The dying man was the owner of a local "Gentlemen's Club." Father Gulley complied with his request. A day after receiving the sacrament, the dying man passed away. Not surprisingly, Fr. Gulley was asked to celebrate his funeral mass. The funeral unexpectedly drew an enormous number of people. Members of the congregation included many of the attractive young ladies who were employees of the Gentlemen's Club and a reporter from a local newspaper, the Albany Times-Union.

In his funeral homily, Fr. Gulley made reference to the Heavenly Father's House. He pointed out that the House of the Father is spacious enough to accommodate all peoples regardless of their station or walk in life. In addition he spoke of the many windows and doors of our eternal home, the kingdom, all of which remind us of the wide diversity of people who desire to enter into the presence of the Lord.

Fr. Gulley maintained that all that is necessary to enter the Father's House as one exits this life... is the right password. And that password is "Mercy." "Have mercy on me, O Lord!"

In the next day's edition of the Times-Union, Fr. Gulley's remarks were highlighted with approval by the reporter who covered the event on the front page of the second section of the newspaper. His consoling words elicited an extraordinary number of phone calls and letters, applauding the priest for his wisdom and compassion! In the gospels, the so-called seed parables remind us of the hidden power of God's word. In today's parable of the mustard seed, we can rejoice that great things can emerge from the smallest of beginnings. The Mustard seed is the least of all seeds!

Let me return to the Gospel reading. When it (the mustard seed) is sown, "...it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches so that the birds of the air make rest in its shade" (Mk.4:32). In mentioning large branches, Jesus is calling upon the popular Old Testament image of a majestic tree, where the birds of the sky can find shelter and rest. Let us consider the words the prophet Ezekiel:

"On the mountain height of Israel, will I plant it, that it may bring forth branches and bear fruit, and become a noble cedar, under it will dwell all kinds of beasts; in the shade of its branches birds of every sort will rest"

The parable points to the future worldwide reach of the Kingdom of God. The kingdom (seed) will ripen and mature into an immense tree in which all peoples will find a home, a shelter and a place of rest.

But let me share another insight. Father George Rutler, a priest of the Archdiocese of New York, has a splendid insight into this parable, which he shares in one of his most recent books. He writes:

"In the mustard seed all manner of birds will gather. Canaries are there, but there will be crows cackling along with them; vultures may share a perch with doves, common sparrows may feel a little intimidated next to peacocks, and for every wise owl you may expect a few cuckoos!"

Yes, the church has a few wise owls but also plenty of cuckoo birds!

The parable of the mustard seed takes account of the apparent insignificance of the early church. Today, our secular unbelieving culture dismisses Christians out of hand as either irrelevant or, even worse, regards them a nuisance. But let us all remember the Divine Gardener still cares for the seed he has sown. Even the proprietor of a "Gentlemen's Club" remains always an object of His love and affection.

Amen