

## CHAPTER TWENTY SEVEN – NEVER MAN SPAKE LIKE THIS MAN

Preaching was the chief occupation of our Blessed Lord during His Public Life. He was always teaching, now on the seashore, now from a boat on the lake, on country roads, in houses, in the synagogues. And everywhere He was surrounded by huge crowds of men and women, boys and girls, fathers holding their children high to see and hear, mothers with their little brown babies in their arms, old folk bent and tottering, scarce able to keep their footing amidst the thousands that stood about Him, crowding and crushing "so that they trod upon one another," says St. Luke.

St. Mark tells us that "they ran flocking to Him from all the cities. And Jesus going out saw a great multitude, and He had compassion on them because they were as sheep not having a shepherd, and He began to teach them many things." The teaching and the Teacher were so delightful that the hearers never tired; fathers of families who had the daily bread to earn, mothers with their household cares upon them, little restless children, stood or sat about Him, silent, spellbound. There was a majesty and a grace in His look, and words, and gestures that held them captive.

He taught as a Master, with an authority none could gainsay, and when He prefaced His words with that solemn: "Amen, amen, I say unto you," there was not a wandering eye nor an inattentive ear in the crowd.

All could understand Him. He did not preach dry sermons like the Scribes and Pharisees, who made the Law harder by explaining it. He taught by parables, stories with a hidden meaning that the people were to find out. By the things they saw around them every day He explained truths which they could not see.

"Be not solicitous" that is, over anxious, "what you shall eat or what you shall put on," He said to them one day. "Consider the ravens, for they sow not, neither do they reap, neither have they storehouse nor barn, and God feedeth them. How much more valuable are you than they." And pointing to the lilies bespangling the fields all round, He went on: "Consider the lilies how they grow; they labour not, neither do they spin. But I say to you, not even Solomon in all his glory was clothed like one of these."

The sparrows, innumerable in Palestine, were hopping about in His path.

"Are not five sparrows," He said, "sold for two farthings? and not one of them is forgotten before God. Fear not, you are of more value than many sparrows." Then, looking round on the fathers who with their little ones were standing by, He said:

"What father is there here who when his child asks for bread will give him a stone, or for a fish will give him a serpent? If you then being evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father from Heaven give good things to them that ask Him."

When He spoke of a net filled with all kinds of fish and of the sorting on the seashore, the rough men of the Lake gave an approving nod, and understood that while the world lasts, good and bad men will be together, and that at the end of the world there will be a great separation, the good will be taken to Heaven and the bad cast away.

He said that a woman who has lost a little coin lights a candle and sweeps the house and seeks diligently till she finds it. The wives and mothers looked at one another and smiled, and understood what He wanted to show them—the value of the soul, stamped with the image of the King of kings, who has taken such pains to find it when it was lost.

The farmers and the labourers liked the parables which told of men being hired to work all day and being paid when evening comes; and about the seed that was sown on different kinds of soil, and was wasted in one place whilst in another it sprang up and yielded good fruit; about the fig-tree, too, which its master had taken every care to cultivate and which never made him any return, so that at last he ordered it to be cut down and destroyed. And all, even the little children, understood the parable of the cruel rich man who when his life of feasting and pleasure was over was punished in terrible torments, whilst Lazarus, the patient beggar at his gate, who had been refused even the crumbs that fell from his table, was comforted.

Jewish children, like all others, loved to play at being grown up, and to have weddings and funerals. Our Lord had Himself played at these things with His little companions at Nazareth. When He spoke about their games in His preaching, the children in the crowd were delighted to see He knew all about them and could make parables of them.

One day He told the people a parable to show them how foolish it is to think only of this life which is going so fast, and not to be getting ready for that life which is to last for ever.

There was a certain rich man who had so much corn that his barns were full to overflowing. "What shall I do?" he said to himself, "for I have no more room to store my corn. This will I do. I will pull down my barns and build greater, and I will gather therein all that I have. And I will say to my soul: Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thy rest, eat, drink, make good cheer." But God said to him: "Thou fool, this night do they require thy soul of thee, and whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?"

The little ones in the crowd were listening attentively, and could see quite well why this man was called a fool. For who but a fool would speak to his soul like that, or think that barns full of corn could satisfy the soul that is made for God and for Heaven! What use were the man's riches to him when he came to die, and "what would it profit a man," as our Lord asked, "if he were to gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"

Those words, "lose his soul," are very terrible. Sometimes our Blessed Lord spoke to the people about terrifying things, as a father or mother will frighten a child of the fire lest it should go too near and fall in. He told even His dear disciples to fear that fire which is never put out, which will burn body and soul for ever. He spoke in terrible words of that "place of torments" to make us all fear sin, which alone can take us there. He said that as we part with eye, or hand, or foot to preserve our life, so must we give up anything, however useful or pleasant, rather than let it lead us into sin. And, as He spoke, the crowd could see by His face and by the tone of His voice that He knew all about that dreadful place and wanted to save them from going there.

He told them they must be like servants in charge of a house who have to be watching, ready to open to their lord whenever he knocks, either at midnight, or at cockcrow, or in the morning. They knew what He meant. The house which belongs to the Lord is our soul. And we are in charge. He calls us to Him by death when we least expect it. We must keep our soul always in the state of grace and ready for Him. This is to be found watching. The people delighted in finding out our Lord's meaning as He went on, and sometimes their admiration broke out in joyous exclamations:

"This is the Prophet indeed! This is the Christ!" Because their hearts were simple and upright they understood the Divine Teacher better by far than the Scribes and Pharisees who were eaten up by pride and envy. Some of these were generally found among His hearers, not to learn of Him—they would have scorned to do that—but "to lie in wait for Him" says St. Luke, "seeking to catch something from His mouth that they might accuse Him."

One day they sent officers to seize Him. Provided with cords to bind Him and lead Him away prisoner, these men joined the listening crowd. But when they beheld the majesty of His countenance and heard His wondrous words, they stood as if transfixed, not daring so much as to think of laying a finger on Him. Until He ceased to speak they stood there with the crowd, still, reverent, charmed. Then they returned to give an account of themselves.

"Why have you not brought Him?" said their angry masters.

"Never man spake like this Man," was the answer.