

“I will utter what has been hidden since the foundation of the world.”

Mt 13:35

Throughout the Gospels Our Lord draws on many ordinary circumstances of daily life to illustrate His point. To the fishermen, Peter, Andrew, James, and John, He tells them that they will become fishers of men (Mt 4:19). In a country where many were sheep farmers He teaches His disciples that He is the Good Shepherd (Jn 10:11). In a dry land where fresh, clean, cold water was valued, He proclaims Himself to be the source of life-giving water (Mt 7:37-39). And at a time when bread and wine formed staple ingredients in the diet of many people He made the Holy Eucharist to be given to us in the form of bread and wine.

Again and again, and in so many different ways, Our Lord uses the things around Him – things familiar to everyone – to illustrate His message. A casual reader of the Gospels might suppose that Our Lord looked around Him, found the things that were easily recognizable to everyone, and just used what was to hand.

But what if it wasn't just a coincidence that Our Lord calls upon the images of sheep and shepherds, of fishing nets and fishermen, of water and the quenching of thirst, of wheat and grain and bread, and food for our souls? What if there was more to it than accident?

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We tend to see the surface of things, and how they appear to us on a first encounter. Yet Our Lord taught in parables precisely because God's message demands not just a superficial brush with what is said, but a much more engaging encounter. It is often easy to understand the *words* that Our Lord says, but it is not always easy to absorb their

meaning. Our Lord demands of His followers that we struggle with His words, that we wrestle with them, as Jacob wrestled all night long with the Angel of God (Gen 32:24-32).

In part, our wrestling with the Word of God helps us to get to grips with a far deeper meaning than we might at first have thought possible or even necessary. There is a multi-layered wealth of wisdom in all that Our Lord says and does, and if we are willing to spend time pondering Our Lord's words and actions then we can enter into a far deeper relationship with the Incarnate Son of God and become more conformed to His likeness.

Yet there is something even more hidden here. Our Lord does not draw upon the imagery that He just happens to find lying around, as if He spent His time looking about Him and thinking, 'H'm. What can I see in this village that I could use in my teaching?' No! God does not operate on such an accidental basis.

Rather, there is something much more profound – and indeed, much more supernatural – going on in Our Lord's choice of images and examples. "I will utter what has been hidden since the foundation of the world." That's the key. Our Lord's task throughout His public ministry is to reveal something that is quite hidden from our eyes until He makes it known to us, as St Paul says elsewhere, and drawing on the words of Isaiah, 'Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither has it entered into the heart of man, what things God has prepared for them that love him' (1 Cor 2:9).

I do not say that sheep and fish and bread were created by God just so that Our Lord could use them many thousands of years later to illustrate His sermons. But I *do* say that the Maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible, ordered all things according to His divine plan, and that all things – in heaven and on earth – were put in place by the Creator in order to bring to fulfilment a supernatural plan that God had in mind from before the world was begun.

Think of that for a moment. God may not have invented sheep and fish and bread just so that He could use them in His public ministry, but when He created them He *did* have in mind, from before He even began the work of creation, that He would use them nonetheless, and He knew *how* He was going to use them; He knew the value and the meaning that He was going to give them. And this is true of all that Our Lord uses as part of His work of revelation. As He said to Pontius Pilate, ‘For this was I born, and for this came I into the world: that I should give testimony to the truth’ (Jn 18:37). The truth He is speaking of here is the truth about the supernatural reality of God and the things of God, a truth that we cannot possibly know unless and until God Himself reveals it to us.

And it is the working out of this divine plan – this revealing of the truth, and the bringing to fulfilment of a plan that was in the mind of God before the world was begun – that we call Divine Providence, and in which God calls us to trust, even – and especially – when things are going wrong, because in the end God knows what He is about.

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