

THE PARABLES OF JESUS

A Catholic Bible Study

· SESSION ONE ·

The Kingdom Has Come

The Sower · The Growing Seed · The Mustard Seed · The Leaven

“The kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel.”

Mark 1:15 (RSV2CE)

LEADER PREPARATION GUIDE · WITH PARTICIPANT DISCUSSION

SESSION OVERVIEW

This session opens the series, and it carries three tasks at once: to introduce the parable as a way of teaching, to introduce the Kingdom of God as a coherent reality, and to begin forming participants in the disposition of receiving the Word. Jesus answers the question “What is the Kingdom?” not with a definition but with four parables, gathered here from the parable discourses of Matthew 13 and Mark 4: the Sower, the Growing Seed, the Mustard Seed, and the Leaven. Read together they form a single picture of how the Kingdom comes into the world. The Word is sown (the Sower); it grows by a power that is not the worker’s (the Growing Seed); it begins small and becomes large (the Mustard Seed); it transforms what it touches from within (the Leaven).

The deepest Old Testament background for the session is Daniel 2 and Daniel 7, where the Kingdom of God arrives as a stone that becomes a mountain filling the earth and as an everlasting kingdom given to the Son of Man, Jesus’ own favorite self-designation. Because that background does real work in the discussion, it is developed once, in full, under Old Testament Roots below, and it is opened with the group by discovery rather than lecture. Brant Pitre develops this Daniel connection at length; in a real sense the parables of this session are Daniel 2 in narrative form.

The leader’s posture in this session is to instill wonder, not to deliver a lecture. The Kingdom is not a topic to analyze; it is a reality to enter.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Why Jesus speaks in parables

When the disciples ask Jesus why he teaches in parables (Mt 13:10), his answer is striking. He says that knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom has been given to them and not to others, and he quotes Isaiah 6:9-10 directly, framing the parables as the fulfillment of that prophetic word (Mt 13:11-15). The parable both reveals and conceals: it opens to those who hunger to understand and closes to those who do not. This is not arbitrary. A parable rewards attention; it cannot be skimmed. It requires the hearer to engage, to wrestle with the image until meaning emerges. The Kingdom cannot be received passively, and the form of Jesus' teaching is itself part of the teaching.

The Sower: the seed and the soils

The Sower is one of only three parables Jesus interprets directly (Mt 13:18-23; cf. Mk 4:14-20; Lk 8:11-15). The seed is "the word of the kingdom" (Mt 13:19). The four soils are four conditions in which the Word lands, and they map onto recognizable human dispositions:



The Catholic exegetical tradition reads the parable on several levels. At the literal level, the four soils are four kinds of hearers responding to Jesus' preaching, and by extension to all preaching of the gospel. At the moral level, St. Augustine and others apply the parable to the interior life of every Christian, recognizing that the same heart can be path, rocky, or thorny in different seasons (cf. *Confessions* VIII.12, where grace breaks open even a resistant will). The pastoral application is faithful, but it should not displace the literal force: Jesus is first describing four responses to his message.

St. John Chrysostom presses the responsibility of the hearer (*Homilies on Matthew*, Hom. 44). The seed is the same, the Sower is the same, the intention is the same; the variable is the soil. His challenge is uncomfortable: do not blame the Word, the preacher, or the season; ask what kind of soil you are.

Curtis Mitch and Scott Hahn, in the Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: New Testament commentary on Matthew 13, add a salvation-historical dimension. Israel has long been the field where the Word was sown through the prophets; the four soils describe Israel's varied response, now reaching its decisive form in the response to Jesus.

The Growing Seed: the Kingdom grows by its own power

This parable appears only in Mark (4:26-29). The man scatters seed, sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed grows "of itself" (Mk 4:28). The Greek is *automatē*, the source of our word "automatic." The harvest comes, and the man puts in the sickle. The parable corrects two opposite errors. Against passivity it insists on the harvest: a real ingathering will happen. Against frenzied activism it insists on the hidden agency of God: the Kingdom grows by a power that is not the worker's. St. Thomas Aquinas' distinction between operative grace (by which God moves the will) and cooperative grace (by which the will, once moved, moves with God) illuminates the image (*Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 111, a. 2). The Growing Seed can be read, by analogy, as an image of operative grace in narrative form: the farmer's work is real but secondary; the growth is the Lord's.

The Mustard Seed: small beginnings, universal scope

The Mustard Seed (Mt 13:31-32; Mk 4:30-32; Lk 13:18-19) addresses the apparent insignificance of Jesus' movement: a handful of fishermen, a wandering rabbi with no political power, a Kingdom that looks too small to matter. Two Old Testament backgrounds are essential, and both are developed under Old

Testament Roots below: Daniel 2, where a stone “cut out by no human hand” becomes a mountain filling the earth, and the prophetic image of the great tree with birds nesting in its branches (Ezekiel 17:22-24; contrast Daniel 4:10-14). In the discussion these are not explained to the group; the group reads them and finds the connection. (A botanical note: the plant is most likely *Brassica nigra*, black mustard, common in first-century Palestine and able to grow into a shrub of eight to ten feet; *Mishnah Kil’ayim* 3:2 reflects rabbinic awareness that mustard behaved like a shrub in cultivation. Jesus’ point is disproportion, not absolute size: the smallest beginning, a tree-like result.)

The Leaven: hidden transformation

The Leaven (Mt 13:33; Lk 13:20-21) describes the same dynamic from the inside. A woman takes leaven and hides it (Greek *enekrypsen*, “she hid”) in three measures of flour until the whole batch is leavened. The detail is significant. In Israel’s ritual law leaven is excluded from Passover and from most grain offerings (Ex 12:15; Lev 2:11), though it is permitted in the thanksgiving offering (Lev 7:13); in later usage it often serves as an image of corrupting influence, and Jesus himself uses it negatively elsewhere (“the leaven of the Pharisees,” Mt 16:6). Here the image is reversed: the Kingdom is what works invisibly until the whole is changed. Paired with the Mustard Seed (Mt 13:31-33; Lk 13:18-21), the two form a complete picture: the Mustard Seed describes outward expansion, the Leaven inward transformation. The Kingdom grows in both directions at once, outward into the world and inward into every life it touches.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

These passages are the deep roots of Session 1’s parables; these images lived in Israel’s Scriptures and would have been familiar to many of Jesus’ first hearers. This is the one place they are developed in full; in the discussion the group will read the key ones and find the connection for themselves. Reading them alongside the parables shows that Jesus is not inventing images. He is announcing the fulfillment of promises centuries old.

ISAIAH 55:10-11 (RSV2CE)

“For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and return not thither but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and prosper in the thing for which I sent it.”

The seed of the Sower is not generic religious teaching. It is the Word of God of which Isaiah speaks, and that Word carries within itself the power of divine intention. The question is not whether the Word will accomplish God’s purpose, but what kind of soil receives it.

DANIEL 2:34-35 (RSV2CE, SELECTED)

“As you looked, a stone was cut out by no human hand, and it smote the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. ... But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.”

Daniel's vision is the closest Old Testament parallel to the Mustard Seed: a kingdom that begins as a stone and ends as a mountain, "cut out by no human hand," which is to say not the product of human empire-building. This is exactly the pattern of the Mustard Seed: small beginning, universal scope, divine origin.

EZEKIEL 17:22-24 (RSV2CE, SELECTED)

"I myself will take a sprig from the lofty top of the cedar, and will set it out; I will break off from the topmost of its young twigs a tender one, and I myself will plant it upon a high and lofty mountain. ... And it will bring forth boughs and bear fruit, and become a noble cedar; and under it will dwell all kinds of beasts; in the shade of its branches birds of every sort will nest."

God himself plants the sprig that becomes the sheltering tree. When Jesus says the Kingdom is like a mustard seed that becomes a great shrub where birds nest, the Church's exegetical tradition has long heard in this image Jesus identifying his own movement as the fulfillment of Ezekiel's promise.

DANIEL 4:10-12 (RSV2CE, SELECTED)

"I saw, and behold, a tree in the midst of the earth; and its height was great. The tree grew and became strong, and its top reached to heaven ... And in it was food for all. The beasts of the field found shade under it, and the birds of the air dwelt in its branches."

The tree in Nebuchadnezzar's dream is an earthly empire, vast and sheltering, and it is then cut down (Dan 4:14). When Jesus uses the same image of birds in branches, the contrast suggests itself: earthly empires, however vast and sheltering, are cut down (Dan 4:14), while Daniel elsewhere promises a kingdom that "shall never be destroyed" (Dan 2:44). Read together, the images point to a Kingdom that will become universal and, unlike every earthly empire, will not be cut down.

ISAIAH 6:9-10 (RSV2CE)

"And he said, 'Go, and say to this people: Hear and hear, but do not understand; see and see, but do not perceive. Make the heart of this people fat, and their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.'"

Jesus quotes this directly to explain why the parables both reveal and conceal (Mt 13:14-15). The parables fulfill Isaiah's prophetic word: they reveal the Kingdom to those who hunger to receive and harden those who resist. The form of the teaching is itself both a judgment and a mercy.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

Method: *Direct quotations appear in quotation marks with a specific source citation. Where a Father's teaching is faithfully represented but no single quotable line fits the exposition, it is given as paraphrase, without quotation marks, with citation to the work where the teaching appears.*

St. Augustine of Hippo (354–430)

St. Augustine's pastoral conviction, expressed throughout his sermons and his works on grace, is that no soul is permanently fixed in its present condition. The same heart that has been a footpath in one season can be plowed open by suffering and grace and become fruitful. His own conversion, recounted in *Confessions* VIII.12, is for him the standing witness of this truth: the resistant will can be turned, and decisively.

From the opening of the *Confessions* (I.1): "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you." The good soil of the Sower is, finally, the heart that has stopped trying to rest anywhere except in God.

St. John Chrysostom (347–407)

In his *Homilies on the Gospel of Matthew*, Homily 44 (on Mt 13:1-23), St. John Chrysostom develops the responsibility of the hearer. The seed is the same in every case, the Sower is the same, and the Sower's intention is the same; the variable is the soil. He presses his congregation: do not blame the preacher, the Scripture, or the season for the unfruitfulness of your own heart. Examine the soil.

He notes a striking pastoral point: the Sower does not avoid sowing on hard ground, rocky places, or thorny soil. He sows everywhere. The implication is hope, for the rocky might become rich, the wayside arable, the thorns cleared. The Sower's indiscriminate generosity is itself a form of hope.

St. Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274)

St. Thomas Aquinas treats the parables in his *Commentary on Matthew* and gathers the Fathers in the *Catena Aurea*. On the Mustard Seed, a recurrent theme among the Fathers gathered in the Catena is that smallness of origin is no measure of greatness of destiny: the Kingdom's humble beginnings in Galilee are no argument against its universal scope. On the Growing Seed his teaching on grace illuminates the parable. In *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 111, a. 2 he distinguishes operative grace (by which God moves the will) from cooperative grace (by which the will, once moved, then moves with God). The Growing Seed can be read, by analogy, as an image of operative grace in narrative form: the man scatters and sleeps, and the seed grows by a power he does not produce.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

CCC 541

"Jesus inaugurates the Church by preaching the Good News, that is, the coming of the Reign of God, promised over the ages in the scriptures: 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel.' To carry out the will of the Father, Christ inaugurated the kingdom of heaven on earth."

CCC 543

"Everyone is called to enter the kingdom. First announced to the children of Israel, this messianic kingdom is intended to accept men of all nations. To enter it, one must first accept Jesus' word."

CCC 546

"Jesus' invitation to enter his kingdom comes in the form of parables, a characteristic feature of his teaching. ... Through his parables he invites people to the feast of the kingdom, but he also asks for a

radical choice: to gain the kingdom, one must give everything. Words are not enough; deeds are required.”

SESSION GOALS AND TIME ESTIMATE

Goals for the leader

1. Establish the series arc: the Kingdom is here, it is growing, and it requires reception. 2. Help participants identify, with honesty, what kind of soil their heart is in this season. 3. Plant the central question that will run through all ten sessions: am I receiving the Word? 4. Begin to form an atmosphere of wonder rather than analysis.

Time estimate (90 minutes)



The Sower (read, three-tier discussion): 30 min



The Growing Seed (read, brief discussion): 10 min



The Mustard Seed and the Leaven, with Old Testament discovery: 25 min



Application and concrete commitment: 10 min



Closing prayer: 5 min

If the Sower discussion runs long, abbreviate the Mustard Seed and Leaven to one discovery question and one Life question, and draw the rest from Going Deeper.

PARTICIPANT DISCUSSION GUIDE

Opening Prayer

Leader, or invite a participant to pray:

“Heavenly Father, you sow your Word into our hearts every time we open Scripture and every time we listen for your voice. Open our ears to hear, our minds to understand, and our hearts to receive what you have planted in us. Give us the patience to let your Word grow in its own time, and the courage to let it transform us. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.”

Check-In (5–10 min)

Go around the group: name, what brought you to this study, and one thing you hope to receive from these ten sessions. About a minute each. Keep it moving; the discussion is the heart of the night.

READ ALOUD

Jesus told more parables about the Kingdom of God than about any other subject, but he never defined the Kingdom the way a textbook would. Instead he said, “The kingdom of heaven is like ...” and told a story. Over the next ten weeks we will let Jesus teach us the Kingdom the way he chose to teach it: not as a concept to memorize, but as a reality to enter. Tonight we read four of his Kingdom parables together, drawn from Matthew 13 and Mark 4, each revealing something about how the Kingdom comes into the world. Listen for what they have in common.

PART ONE · THE SOWER (MATTHEW 13:3-9, 18-23)

Have someone read Matthew 13:3-9 aloud. Then read Jesus’ own interpretation in 13:18-23.

MATTHEW 13:3-8 (RSV2CE)

“A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they had not much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil, but when the sun rose they were scorched; and since they had no root they withered away. Other seeds fell upon thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.”

MATTHEW 13:19-23 (RSV2CE, SELECTED)

“When any one hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in his heart ... As for what was sown on good soil, this is he who hears the word and understands it; he indeed bears fruit, and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.”

Q1. [TEXT] Jesus describes four different outcomes for the seed, and the seed is the same in every case. What changes from one outcome to the next? What stays the same?

Leader note: The variable is the soil. The constants are the seed (the Word of God) and the Sower (Christ). This observation is the hinge of the whole parable; it sets up everything else.

Q2. [TEXT] In verses 19-23 Jesus names three forces that keep the Word from bearing fruit: the evil one, persecution and tribulation, and the cares of the world with the deceitfulness of riches. Walk through each. How are they different from one another?

Leader note: The first is direct spiritual opposition (the evil one). The second is suffering that produces falling away where roots are shallow. The third is subtler: not opposition or suffering, but the slow drift of life’s cares and material attachment. Each fails the Word differently, and the Christian life is exposed to all three.

Q3. [TRADITION] St. Augustine reads the four soils as seasons of the same heart rather than four fixed categories of people. St. John Chrysostom stresses that the seed and the Sower are the same, so the variable, and the responsibility, is the soil. Read together, what do these two voices ask of you?

Leader note: St. Augustine offers hope; St. John Chrysostom offers responsibility. Both readings are true and both are pastoral, and the Catholic tradition holds them together: no soul is beyond grace, and each of us is responsible for the soil we are becoming. Resist the move to choose one and dismiss the other.

Q4. [TRADITION] Isaiah 55:10-11 says God's Word "shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose." Yet in the parable the Word is choked or withered in three soils out of four. How do both passages stay true at the same time?

Leader note: God's Word always accomplishes his ultimate purpose in salvation history (Isaiah's claim). The response of any individual heart is nonetheless real; the heart is free to receive or reject in the moment (Jesus' claim). The two are not in contradiction. This holds divine sovereignty and human freedom together without collapsing one into the other.

Q5. [LIFE] Be honest with yourself for a moment, not for the group. Of the four soils, which one most truthfully describes where your heart is right now: path, rocky, thorny, or fruitful? You do not have to share your answer.

Leader note: Give a full minute of silence here. The point is personal recognition, not group sharing. Afterward, invite anyone who wishes to share, but do not press. The recognition is the work.

Q6. [LIFE] The thorns in Jesus' own interpretation are "the cares of the world and the delight in riches" (Mt 13:22). What specific cares and attachments are choking the Word in your life right now?

Leader note: Press for specificity. "Stress" or "busyness" is too vague. What stress, about what, whose approval, what attachment? The parable's diagnostic value is in the specifics. With high-school and young-adult groups, common honest answers include phone use, comparison and image-management online, fear of disappointing parents, romantic attachments, and anxiety about career or grades.

PART TWO · THE GROWING SEED (MARK 4:26-29)

Have someone read Mark 4:26-29 aloud.

MARK 4:26-29 (RSV2CE)

"And he said, 'The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed upon the ground, and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he knows not how. The earth produces of itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.'"

READ ALOUD

The phrase translated "of itself" in verse 28 is the Greek *automatē*, the source of our word "automatic." Mark is making a careful point. The man who scatters the seed is real, and his work matters, but the seed grows by a power that is not his. The Kingdom comes by God's primary action, not ours. Our work is real, and it is also secondary.

Q7. [LIFE] The farmer scatters the seed, then sleeps. The seed grows by a power he does not control and cannot produce. Where in your spiritual life have you been trying to force growth by effort, when this parable suggests your work is to scatter and to wait?

Leader note: This often surfaces ministry workers, parents praying for children, people in difficult prayer, and those longing for the conversion of family or friends. The parable does not eliminate the worker; it relocates the source of growth. “Scatter and sleep” is not passivity; it is trust.

PART THREE · THE MUSTARD SEED AND THE LEAVEN (MARK 4:30-32; MATTHEW 13:33)

Have someone read Mark 4:30-32 and then Matthew 13:33 aloud.

MARK 4:30-32 (RSV2CE)

“And he said, ‘With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.’”

MATTHEW 13:33 (RSV2CE)

“He told them another parable. ‘The kingdom of heaven is like leaven which a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened.’”

Q8. [TEXT] The Mustard Seed describes outward growth, small to large. The Leaven describes inward transformation, a hidden agent that changes the whole batch. Why might Jesus pair these two images? What does each one say that the other does not?

Leader note: The Mustard Seed answers “where is the Kingdom?” (it spreads outward through the world). The Leaven answers “how does the Kingdom work?” (from the inside, hidden, transforming what it touches). Together they describe one Kingdom moving in two directions at once.

READ ALOUD

Jesus’ first hearers did not hear these images in a vacuum. The picture of a tiny seed becoming a great sheltering plant, with birds nesting in its branches, already lived in their Scriptures. Let’s read three of those passages and see what Jesus is doing with them. Read each one slowly before answering.

Have someone read Daniel 2:34-35 aloud.

DANIEL 2:34-35 (RSV2CE, SELECTED)

“As you looked, a stone was cut out by no human hand, and it smote the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. ... But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.”

Q9. [TRADITION] Set Daniel’s vision beside the Mustard Seed. What is the same about the two images, from beginning to end? And what might “cut out by no human hand” be telling us about where this Kingdom comes from?

Leader note: Both move from something tiny to something that fills the earth: stone to mountain, smallest seed to greatest shrub. “Cut out by no human hand” signals divine origin: this Kingdom is not built by human empire. Let the group arrive at “small beginning, universal scope, God’s doing” themselves before you name it. Daniel 2 is the closest Old Testament parallel to the parable.

Have someone read Ezekiel 17:22-24 and then Daniel 4:10-14 aloud, back to back.

EZEKIEL 17:22-24 (RSV2CE, SELECTED)

“I myself will take a sprig from the lofty top of the cedar ... and I myself will plant it upon a high and lofty mountain. ... And it will bring forth boughs and bear fruit, and become a noble cedar; and under it will dwell all kinds of beasts; in the shade of its branches birds of every sort will nest.”

DANIEL 4:10-12, 14 (RSV2CE, SELECTED)

“I saw ... a tree in the midst of the earth; and its height was great ... and the birds of the air dwelt in its branches. ... He cried aloud and said thus, ‘Hew down the tree and cut off its branches.’”

Q10. [TRADITION] Both trees have birds nesting in their branches, the same picture Jesus uses. Read the two side by side. Who plants the tree in Ezekiel, and what happens to the tree in Daniel 4? By choosing this image, what is Jesus claiming about his Kingdom?

Leader note: In Ezekiel God himself plants the tree, and it endures: this is the promise. In Daniel 4 the tree is

Nebuchadnezzar’s empire, and it is cut down: this is the fate of every earthly kingdom. On this reading, Jesus claims the Ezekiel promise for his Kingdom and contrasts it with imperial fate. Read together with Daniel 2:44, the images point to a Kingdom that will become universal and will not be cut down. This is one of the quiet but striking ways he identifies his movement with God’s own action in history.

Q11. [LIFE] The Leaven works invisibly. You cannot watch leaven changing dough; you see only the result. Where do you sense God working in you in ways you cannot yet see or measure? What would it mean to trust that work without evidence of it?

Leader note: A contemplative question; not everyone will have a ready answer, and that is fine. The question itself is formative. Resist the urge to fill the silence.

APPLICATION AND CLOSING

CLOSING CHALLENGE

This week, before you open Scripture or sit down to pray, say one sentence aloud: “Lord, make me good soil today.” Then read or pray slowly, paying attention to what you hear. Come next week ready to share one place where you noticed the Word working in you, even quietly.

Then take the specific “thorn” you named in question six. Write it down. Bring it to confession or to prayer this week.

Scripture Memory

MATTHEW 13:23 (RSV2CE)

“As for what was sown on good soil, this is he who hears the word and understands it; he indeed bears

fruit, and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.”

Closing Prayer

“Lord Jesus, you are the Sower, and your Word is good seed. We confess that our hearts have been path, rocky, and thorny in different seasons, sometimes within a single day. Plow us open. Deepen our roots. Burn away the thorns of anxious attachment. Make us, this week and every week, the good soil that hears your Word, understands it, and bears fruit. We ask this through you, the Word made flesh, the seed planted in our hearts. Amen.”

GOING DEEPER (OPTIONAL)

These questions are available if your group finishes early or if a question opens territory worth exploring. Use them in any order; you do not need all of them.

QGD1. [TEXT] Jesus quotes Isaiah 6:9-10 in Matthew 13:14-15 to explain why some hear the parables and others do not. Read Isaiah 6:9-10 in its prophetic context. What does it mean that the parables fulfill this prophecy?

Leader note: *Isaiah 6 is the prophet’s commissioning, where God tells him his preaching will produce hardness in many hearers. Jesus’ use of the passage signals that the parables are themselves a prophetic action: they reveal to the willing and harden the resistant. The parable form is at once judgment and mercy.*

QGD2. [TRADITION] 1 Peter 1:23 calls believers “born anew ... through the living and abiding word of God,” and James 1:21 calls Christians to “receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.” How do these texts illuminate the Sower?

Leader note: *Both treat the Word as a living seed planted in the believer. The Sower is the foundational image of the New Testament’s account of how grace begins in a soul; the Christian life is, in one sense, the Word working its way out from the seed it was planted as.*

QGD3. [LIFE] St. Augustine’s conviction is that no one is permanently hard ground, yet the path in the Sower is hard and the seed never takes root there at all. Hold these two together. Where does it leave you as you pray for a particular person who currently looks like the path?

Leader note: *A tender question; many will be praying for a parent, child, sibling, or friend who looks closed to faith. St. Augustine’s hope is real: the path can be plowed. But the parable also recognizes that some hearts are closed in this present moment. The Christian’s posture is patient prayer and faithful sowing, neither despair nor presumption. Suffering, time, and grace are the plow.*

QGD4. [TRADITION] Read Daniel 2:44 (“in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed”) alongside Mark 1:15 (“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand”). If the Mustard Seed is Daniel 2 arriving in history, what is Jesus announcing about when the Kingdom comes?

Leader note: *Daniel foresaw a kingdom set up “in the days of those kings” that would never be destroyed. Mark 1:15 announces that those days have arrived: the Kingdom is not merely a distant future hope: it has truly arrived in Christ, is growing now, and will come in its fullness at his return. For Catholic biblical theology this is the linchpin: Christ*

inaugurates Daniel's everlasting Kingdom, and the Church is its seed and beginning in history (CCC 541, 567; Lumen Gentium 5), awaiting its definitive fulfillment when Christ returns in glory.

SCRIPTURE INDEX FOR THIS SESSION

Primary parables: Matthew 13:3-9, 18-23 | Mark 4:26-29 | Mark 4:30-32 | Matthew 13:33

Old Testament background: Isaiah 55:10-11 | Isaiah 6:9-10 | Daniel 2:34-35, 44 | Daniel 4:10-14 | Ezekiel 17:22-24

New Testament support: 1 Peter 1:23 | James 1:21 | Romans 10:17 | 1 Corinthians 3:6-9

Catechism: CCC 541, 543, 546

Sources cited: St. Augustine, *Confessions* I.1 and VIII.12 | St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew*, Hom. 44 | St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 111, a. 2, and *Catena Aurea* on Matthew 13 | Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: New Testament (Mitch and Hahn), on Matthew 13 | Brant Pitre, on the Daniel background of the Kingdom.