

The **Parables** of  
the **Kingdom**  
as Criteria for Discernment



REGNUM  
CHRISTI

## Thy Kingdom Come



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# Introduction

As Regnum Christi members, we are called to make present the mystery of Christ, who announces both the coming of the Kingdom of God and the implications of this coming for those who believe: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Mt 4:17). When speaking of repentance, Matthew uses the Greek verb μετανοέω (metanoia). Metanoia isn’t just repentance. It’s a more profound conversion that includes a transformation of the heart. Accepting the Kingdom implies a change of heart and mind, abandoning previous behaviors and dispositions. This change results in a new way of being, a new way of behaving, and implies repentance for past conduct and attitudes.

As Regnum Christi members, we are also invited to this same change of lifestyle and mentality. The coming of the Kingdom into our lives demands it from us. Once we experience the mystery of Christ, we can no longer be the same. We are invited to a conversion of mind and heart. What does this lifestyle change imply? We already have the answer in the Gospels, namely, in Jesus’ proclamation of the Kingdom and especially in his teachings.

The proclamation of the Kingdom is broad. Its implications and the lifestyle Jesus proposes are contained in his discourses, sayings, and parables, but they are to be found above all in his life. The life of the Master is itself a lesson for us. His message isn’t reduced to elaborate

discourses; his very life engages us and invites us to follow him, commit to him, and imitate him. The Kingdom of God has drawn near to us in the person of Jesus of Nazareth; he is the Kingdom, and our conversion or change of mentality and heart should make us resemble him. If we want to make the mystery of Christ present, we should contemplate his way of being and acting and implore the Holy Spirit for this transformation into Christ.

In Jesus' teachings, we find discourses, sayings, and parables. They are a compass for us as Christians, and especially as Regnum Christi members. They show the path and the direction for making our decisions. Living the Gospel message of the Kingdom of God lets us make the Kingdom present: by incorporating it into our lives, that Kingdom continues to have a presence in and an effect on the world today.

In this essay, we will focus on the parables of the Kingdom as criteria for discerning our Christian and apostolic lifestyle in light of the proclamation of the Kingdom. While it is true that the central proclamation of the Kingdom is contained in Matthew's "Sermon on the Mount" (Mt 5-7) and Luke's "Sermon on the Plain" (Lk 6:20-49), the parables of the Kingdom themselves are key to understanding whether we are living our life and mission according to the demands of the Kingdom that Jesus himself proclaimed and lived.

# The Decalogue of Parables

Jesus communicated his message to his followers in many ways. He adapted himself to the culture and mentality of his time. He also followed the tradition of his Jewish ancestors, using different didactic tools to make his message more understandable. One of these was the parable.

Parables are fictitious stories based on everyday realities that are easy for the audience to understand, such as sowing, fishing, household items, professions, festive celebrations, etc. These narratives use everyday images to explain a truth through figurative language. This is the most characteristic way in which Jesus spoke.

For the listeners of the time, parables were an easy and straightforward way to understand Jesus' message. The same can be true for us. Now, centuries after he preached the parables, we must understand cultural elements that seem detached from or unfamiliar to our current society or culture. With the proper context, the message is simple and easy to understand. To understand the context of the teaching, it is necessary to understand the historical and cultural elements of Jesus' time.

The message Jesus reveals through parables does not just try to transmit a teaching or doctrine; it invites us to conversion. The parables of Jesus are meant to encourage and challenge us, transforming those who hear them. In scripture, we see how some people, though they “hear” the words of Jesus, do not “listen” to them or “understand” them. “Listening” to the parables implies a lifestyle change.

The synoptic Gospels compile several parables expressed by Jesus. However, this essay will focus only on the parables that directly refer to the Kingdom of Heaven, especially the five parables in the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 13.

Matthew presents ten parables throughout his entire Gospel: the parable of the weeds, the mustard seed, the yeast, the treasure, the pearl, and the net (Mt 13); the unforgiving servant (Mt 18:21-35); the laborers in the vineyard (Mt 19:30 – 20:16); the wedding feast (Mt 22:1-14); and the ten virgins (Mt 25:1-13). These are called the “Ten Parables of the Kingdom.” The use of the number ten is not a coincidence. It is a symbolic way to show totality and perfection. If we want to know the Kingdom in its entirety, we must pay special attention to these ten parables.



# The Meaning of the Parables

“Why do you speak to them in parables?” (Mt 13:10) Faced with the preaching of Jesus and his characteristic style of speaking in parables, the disciples wonder about this very particular way of speaking. We, too, may ask ourselves, “Why does Jesus speak in parables? Why does he communicate his message of the Kingdom to us this way?”

Matthew offers an explanation in Mt 13:10-16, of which we will speak later. But to understand why Jesus speaks in parables, we must understand the context in which they are presented.

When we briefly review the Gospel of Matthew, we recall that Jesus has already given his inaugural and central teaching about the Kingdom in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5-7). He has already performed his first miracles (Mt 8-9). People are starting to react to his message and his person with acceptance or rejection (Mt 9:33-34). The Twelve have been chosen and have received some instruction to announce the Kingdom themselves (Mt 10). After all these events, Jesus begins to speak in parables.

This makes us reflect on the fact that there are a few steps prior to understanding and living according to the parables. First, we are invited to get to know the Teacher and let ourselves be attracted to his person and message, proclaimed with authority. Next, we should allow him to act in our lives, performing both physical and spiritual healing as we experience his power over all the forces of evil. Also, before understanding and living by the message of the parables, we need to know that we, like the apostles, are chosen by him personally.

This process is manifest in the Parable of the Sower, at the beginning of the thirteenth chapter of Matthew's gospel: "A sower went out to sow" (Mt 13:3). The context of this parable is Jesus' ministry itself. In chapters 5-12, Jesus has already been sowing the seed of the Good News. That seed fell on different types of ground, but it only produced fruit in some of them. Jesus has been accepted by some and rejected by others. Only those who have accepted the proclamation of the Kingdom and let themselves be touched by him and his miracles can understand the message of the parables. That is the scriptural context of the parable of the sower.

We return to the question posed by the disciples: "Why do you speak to them in parables?" Jesus' answer refers to the prophecy of Isaiah 6:9-10: "This is why I speak to them in parables, because 'they look but do not see and hear but do not listen or understand'" (Mt 13:13). On one hand, Jesus presents those who have eyes but do not see, ears but do not hear. This refers to those who have rejected him after the proclamation of the Kingdom. Despite seeing miracles and hearing his message, pronounced with authority, they have not believed in him and

thus have not committed to him. They cannot understand the parables. They know each parable's superficial, literal meaning but cannot reach the depth of the message Jesus communicates.

The reference to “eyes that do not see and ears that do not hear” is understood in the context of the Old Testament. This expression is used to speak about the people's hardness of heart and rebellion (cf. Is 6:10). Eyes and ears are outward signs of the heart. In the Hebrew mentality, the heart is the center of the person and the place where man's spiritual powers reside. The heart is the seat of the intellect and reason; it is the center of projects, decisive choices, the moral and religious life, and the home of the emotional life. Jesus indicates that those who look but do not see and hear but do not listen or understand have hardened their hearts toward his message and have not wanted to convert. They cannot understand his parables.

On the other hand, Jesus goes on to say, “But blessed are your eyes, because they see, and your ears, because they hear” (Mt 13:16). He calls those “blessed” whose eyes see and whose ears hear. This refers to those who have committed to Jesus and thus receive the possibility of understanding the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven presented in the parables. They have received a gift of knowledge by following Jesus. Therefore, comprehending the parables does not mean a mere act of understanding, but, above all, it means accepting the Kingdom, whose fruit is blessedness or happiness.

This second group that sees and hears is later presented by Matthew as the scribes who bring from their storeroom both the new and the old (cf. Mt 13:52). The scribe or scholar of the law is an expert in the Scriptures who interprets and updates them for the present. Thus, Jesus presents the disciples, who have listened to and understood the parables, as the true scribes trained to read Scripture (the old) in their true meaning, brought to fulfillment with Jesus' message (the new).

To the question, "Why do you speak to them in parables?" we, as Regnum Christi members, are invited to a conversion of mind and heart – to commit to this message of Jesus that implies a radical change of life. Therefore, the parables become criteria for discernment. They shed light on whether we are like those who have eyes but do not see and ears but do not hear or whether we are like the disciples who, by welcoming the message of the Kingdom, commit to it and become new scribes who bring from our storeroom, that is, our heart, both the new and the old.

**Questions for reflection:**

***In my personal life:** Where do I find myself in my following of Jesus and the assimilation of his message?*

***In the apostolate:** Where do the people who I am invited to share the Good News with find themselves? Have they already accepted the message of the Kingdom? Are they ready to let themselves be guided by the parables as criteria for discernment, or is it necessary to take a few preliminary steps?*

*To answer these questions, allow yourself to be enlightened by the Word by reading the parable of the sower in the light of those who don't see/hear—reject—hardening of heart; understand—welcome—happiness (cf. Mt 13:3-9, Mk 4:1-9; Lk 8:4-8).*

# The Parables as Principles for Discernment

As Regnum Christi members, we are called to live out the mystery of the Kingdom, making it present in our hearts, in the hearts of others, and in society. This mystery of the Kingdom implies a lifestyle lived in every personal and apostolic decision. Jesus has given us his teachings in discourses and parables so that we know how to live according to the message of the Kingdom. The parables encourage and challenge us to live a certain way in order to make the Kingdom of God present in our lives.

Four discernment principles emerge from an attentive listening to these parables. They are not the only or exclusive criteria for discernment that can be gleaned from a prayerful reading, but they are a foundation on which each Regnum Christi member can build through their own reflection on the living Word, pronounced by Christ and contained in the Gospels.

Each is invited to prayerfully read the parables found in the Gospel texts and listen attentively to God's voice, who speaks in your heart through his Word.



# Principle 1: Temporal duality

*Parable of the wheat and the  
weeds (Mt 13:24-30)*

This parable is a story about a man who sows good seed in his field, while at night, the enemy sows weeds all through the wheat. When these seeds grow and develop together, the servants of the householder realize this and suggest to him that they pull up and gather the weeds so that only the wheat is left. The householder refuses: “No if you pull up the weeds, you might uproot the wheat along with them. Let them grow together until harvest.” When the moment of the harvest arrives, the harvesters are to burn the weeds and store the wheat in the barn.

The parable of the wheat and weeds presents two plants that grow together in the field. One of these is wheat, a grain that bears edible fruit and is a staple in the diet of the inhabitants of Galilee, the region in which Jesus pronounces his parable.

On the other hand, weeds grow spontaneously, and their seed’s flour is poisonous. It is an invasive grass that looks much like wheat, so it is difficult to tell one plant from another until they have grown enough. It is also known as “false wheat.” Besides being poisonous, it takes up spa-

ce and nutrients in the soil, hindering the good plant from spreading its roots and competing for moisture.

An attentive reading helps us understand that the Kingdom of Heaven has two stages: present and future.

The first stage, earthly fulfillment, is not a homogenous reality. There is good and nutritious wheat but also bad and poisonous weeds. The progressive fulfillment of the Kingdom encounters the presence and activity of the enemy.

This makes us see that the Kingdom does not arrive in a “human” way. It doesn’t immediately try eliminating the evil that grows together with the good. It allows time for the good seed to arrive at its full maturity, and it is assumed that in that time, there will be weeds—that is, ordeals. These will help the good seed become stronger and more mature until the harvester arrives.

The second stage begins when the plants are separated. This is an image of the final judgment when the righteous will be separated from the wicked. Ultimately, the wicked’s destiny will be the same death they chose as deceptive and poisonous weeds.

In our personal and apostolic lives, we are called to accept the temporal duality of the Kingdom, which we also call “now, but not yet fully.” This leads the Christian to hope and trust, believing in the mysterious action of God. God may act in his way and his time, but he always acts. The “now” is distinct from the time of “fullness,” but interestingly, the continuity is emphasized. Something lasting is present in the “now,” and the Regnum Christi member must learn to recognize it. There is wheat, not just a seed.

## There is already fruit of the Kingdom in this first present stage

**For personal and community reflection:**

- *Consider the two stages of the Kingdom and their continuity (the present and the future).*
- *Remember that in the present stage, there is wheat (goodness) and weeds (evil), and the weeds are only uprooted at the end of the harvest. We ask for the grace to peacefully accept this reality, which exists both in the world and in one's heart.*
- *Maintain a hopeful outlook regarding the future, when the weeds (evil) will be cast into the fire, and the fruits of the wheat (goodness) will be gathered.*
- *See how this parable speaks to you today in the circumstances of your life and mission.*





## Principle 2: Potential of the good seed and disproportionate growth :

*Parable of the mustard seed  
(Mt 13:31-32)*

This parable compares the Kingdom of Heaven to a mustard seed. This type of seed measures a millimeter across, and 750 seeds weigh one gram. Strictly speaking, it is not the smallest of seeds, but in ancient times, it was metaphorically referred to as the smallest living reality. The parable tells how a person sows the smallest of seeds in his field: the mustard seed. It grows and becomes a tree that is, in turn, a home for birds.

This parable invites us, as Regnum Christi members, to reflect on the contrast Jesus presents between the smallest of seeds and a great tree. The Kingdom of Heaven is presented as a tiny reality that becomes very large by divine action. Similarly, in our personal and apostolic life, the seed of the Kingdom is tiny and hard to perceive. Sowing this seed involves a great act of faith in its poten-

tial. Nevertheless, modifying the seed because it seems small and incapable of producing a great tree would undermine the proclamation of the Kingdom. The seed is tiny, simple, diminutive, and minuscule, but it is called to be a large tree.

Despite the contrast between the beginning (small) and the end (large), there is also continuity. The ending was already contained in its beginning. The seed contains all the potential to become a mustard tree. This parable invites us to believe in the potentiality of the good seed. It is the Kingdom itself that contains an expansive dynamism. We are called to sow seeds of the Kingdom of God, although they seem small to us. We will be surprised when we see the fruits of the Kingdom arise in our hearts and the hearts of the people who receive the seed of the Kingdom.

Finally, the parable describes this mustard tree, which stems from a tiny seed and becomes a home: birds nest in its branches. This means that extraordinary growth benefits others: a tree in which birds make their nests. In Old Testament culture, different trees were used as images of different kingdoms. In that context, this tree is an image of the new Kingdom of God, the Church. Sowing the seed of the Kingdom creates a space that becomes home, family, assembly, and Church, in which birds find what they need for their sustenance.

**For personal and community reflection:**

- *Remember that the Kingdom of Heaven is compared to a very small reality (mustard seed or yeast) with a significant impact.*
- *Consider that despite the contrast between the beginning (a tiny seed) and the end (a large tree), there is a continuity: the ending is already present in the beginning.*
- *Reflect on the fact that extraordinary growth extends to benefit others (a tree in which birds make their nests).*
- *See how this parable speaks to you today in the circumstances of your life and mission.*

# Principle 3: In secret



## *Parable of the yeast (Mt 13, 33)*

Jesus presents a similar metaphor alongside the parable of the mustard seed. This time, he compares the Kingdom of Heaven to the yeast kneaded into flour to leaven the whole batch. Yeast is a fungus that ferments carbohydrates. It almost always has a negative connotation of corruption, but its positive meaning is presented in this case. It refers to the yeast's hidden but essential effect on the flour, causing it to rise.

In this parable, as in the previous one, disproportion is introduced. To grasp its meaning, we must understand what Jesus refers to with the three measures of flour mentioned. A first-century Jewish “measure” was a fixed amount equivalent to 13.3 kilograms. So, three measures of flour meant enough bread for 150 people. Jesus uses the image to highlight the contrast in an exaggerated way: a large amount of dough is produced in relation to the littleness of the fermenting agent.

In this parable, there is an insistence on the smallness of the beginning that overflows into an apparently disproportionate final result. This parallels the parable of the mustard seed: just as the seed was hidden in the earth, the yeast is hidden in the dough and transforms it. All its efficacy unfolds in secret. It remains hidden from the sight

of men, but God carries out his action, making the flour ferment. God accomplishes the mysterious fermentation that is not seen by human eyes.

This parable reminds everyone who wants to make the Kingdom present in their lives and in the lives of others that the action of grace is performed by God in secret. It is hard for us to fully appreciate the consequences of this parable. Sometimes, the action of grace is presented in a small way that achieves its activity in a progressive manner hidden from the eyes of men and the world. But those who accept this truth given by Jesus and resolve to believe and trust in it can perceive over time how this hidden reality has leavened the whole batch in its time and way

**For personal and community reflection:**

- *Meditate on how the Kingdom is presented as something hidden: the seed buried in the earth or the yeast hidden in the dough.*
- *See how the yeast is a hidden yet active reality; thus, all its efficacy unfolds in secret.*
- *See how this parable speaks to you today in the circumstances of your life and mission.*



# Principle 4: Dynamic of the finding of the Kingdom

*Parable of the treasure and  
the pearl (Mt 13:44-46)*

Finally, we come to two “twin” parables that complement each other: the parable of the treasure and the parable of the pearl. The first is the story of a buried treasure whose discovery moves its finder to sell everything to buy the field it’s in, bringing about great joy. When speaking of a treasure, Jesus is probably referring to vessels of clay with silver coins or precious stones that were occasionally found buried in the ground for fear that they could be stolen. The treasure symbolizes something of immense value, worthy of being possessed and sought. The image of a treasure was used in ancient times as a symbol of worth or importance.

Matthew’s text mentions that the discoverer of this treasure is filled with immense joy. In most New Testament texts, joy (χαρά) is a way of reacting to the eschatological event of salvation. Joy is presented as a fruit of God’s presence in the world through his Spirit. Therefore, this

speaks of joy at the coming of the Kingdom of God, which inaugurates the end times and is fulfilled in the person of Jesus.

The second parable is similar. The Kingdom of Heaven is compared to a fine pearl found by a merchant who sells everything to obtain it. Pearls were considered a luxury item in ancient times. Cleopatra possessed a pearl valued at 10 million sesterii (about \$220,000). Caesar gave Brutus' mother a pearl estimated at 6 million sesterii (about \$130,000).

These two parables set forth the dynamic of the finding of the Kingdom. The Kingdom of Heaven lets itself be found (treasure) or needs to be sought (pearl). These two realities—finding and seeking—complement each other. The finding of the Kingdom is a gratuitous gift that requires man's cooperation to make it his own. The Kingdom – Jesus himself –comes out to meet man, but man must accept his thirst for this treasure or pearl to activate the dynamism of searching. Aware of this, we can both allow the Kingdom of heaven to be found and enliven man's thirst for this Kingdom, thus creating an attitude of searching.

Furthermore, these parables present the Kingdom of Heaven as something of immense value: a treasure and a pearl. The Kingdom is the most precious thing we possess. It has value in itself, and we are called to highlight that value so that it attracts the people who encounter it.

The two parables show one condition for obtaining an object of such worth: total detachment from everything else. To sell everything you have, you should give everything

you possess. This detachment is not considered a foolish loss; on the contrary, it is the best business deal. Therefore, to acquire such a valuable good, no price seems too high; everything pales before the brilliance of what is found. Finding the Kingdom creates a joy that makes one capable of the greatest renunciations and detachments. This isn't a loss; instead, it is considered a huge win. In this way, the Kingdom demands detachment but also enables it. The gift received makes self-giving possible.

Finally, the fruit it produces in the person who discovers the treasure (explicit in the text), or the pearl (implicit in the text) is delight or intense joy. Later, Matthew will present the story of the rich young man who finds the treasure and the pearl in Jesus but cannot renounce everything to follow him. Consequently, he walks away from Jesus sad (cf. Mt 19:22). Thus, the Kingdom of heaven is considered an unexpected joy to be discovered: a joy that is offered, not imposed, a completely free gift.

**For personal and community reflection:**

- *Delve into the dynamic of finding and seeking the Kingdom*
- *Consider the Kingdom as something of enormous value (a treasure and an expensive pearl).*
- *Discover the fruits of delight and joy in the heart of the one who sells everything to end up with the Kingdom.*
- *See how this parable speaks to you today, in the circumstances of your life and mission.*



# Conclusion

To make the Kingdom present in our hearts and society, we must live by Jesus' teachings, contained in the Gospel and expressed frequently in the parables. Letting ourselves be led by the Spirit, according to these principles for discernment, will make our lives and our apostolate bear witness to the presence of the Kingdom in the world. This is not only because we live according to a proposed lifestyle but because we increasingly identify with Jesus' very way of being.

In fact, the parables of the Kingdom have been considered metaphors for Jesus' life: public life, death, and resurrection. He carries out his action during his earthly life (present), and at the same time, he indicates his second coming (future), as we saw in the parable of the wheat and the weeds. He is the good seed or good yeast that is hidden and disappears to become a tree - Body of the Church - and bread that nourishes - the Eucharist. He presents himself as a simple man, and from him will sprout a surprising fruitfulness, as was seen in the parables of the mustard seed and the yeast. Finally, Jesus is the one who comes out to meet man, showing us his value and his love to the extreme, and asks for a response of total commitment, as he does with the rich young man. His value is so immense that it is worth it to give up everything and follow him, creating in his disciples the joy of following him, as presented in the parable of the treasure and the pearl.

Therefore, letting ourselves be guided by the message of the parables, both in our lives and in our apostolate, means making the Kingdom present because it means making the person of Christ present in our lives and in our way of impacting society through apostolate.



