

Beloved in the Lord,

During His earthly ministry, our Lord Jesus Christ was most often addressed by others as *Rabbi* (Teacher) – although He wasn't a teacher in any ordinary sense. He was a carpenter (*tekton*, Mark 6:3), and a sharp distinction was drawn at the time between formally trained teachers and scribes who required the “opportunity of leisure” to master the skills of a teacher (Sirach 38:24-39:1). When Jesus's neighbors heard Him teaching in the synagogue, therefore, they were shocked and asked, “Where did this man get all this? What is the wisdom given to him? ...Is not this the carpenter (*tekton*), the son of Mary?” (Mark 6:2-3). Others responded positively, and so we read, “They were astonished at His teaching: For He taught them as having authority, and not as the scribes” (Mark 1:22). Although Jesus lacked the training of a typical teacher, He exceeded the wisdom and authority of a typical teacher. He was a teacher in a revolutionary and unexpected way.

Today, nearly two millennia from the time He roamed the cities, towns and countryside of what we now call the Holy Land, teaching in synagogues, in private homes, on hillsides and by the seaside, the content of His teaching remains alive in the hearts and minds of believers throughout the world, and it is familiar, even attractive, to countless others beyond the discernible boundaries of the community of believers. Why? In large part because of the manner in which He taught – because of His teaching strategies.

The teaching method most associated with Jesus the Rabbi is the use of the parable. “The Lord said, ‘With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it?’” (Mark 4:30). Jesus knew His audience intimately and drew from their world of experience – observable nature, common occurrences, familial relations, business dealings – examples that communicated eternal truths about god and man. If we wish to understand the love of God, for instance, we need look no further than the lilies of the field (Matthew 6:28), or to the way that any father would give his son a piece of bread and not a stone (Matthew 7:9). Although the parable made accessible the truth of God and His plan for man, effort is required. “The reason I speak to them in parables is that ‘seeing they do not perceive, and hearing they do not listen, nor do they understand’” (Matthew 13:13). Jesus's most powerful parables get under our skin because they require of us an effort, a response. “Who proved neighbor to the man in need? ... Go and do likewise.” How did the elder brother respond to the father's plea to join the celebration of the return of the prodigal? What about the brothers of the rich man in Hades?

In the Great Commission, Jesus instructed His disciples to go and teach all that He commanded (Matthew 28:20) to all the nations. In His earthly ministry, He not only taught them Good News, but He also provided them with the tools or methods to continue His teaching ministry. The Apostles, Fathers of the Church and many saints also taught the Good News of Christ. They too used many of the Lord's strategies, in addition to using the teaching strategies of *their* day, such as the tools of rhetoric, as was expected of teachers in the classical world. Today's religious educators have thus inherited a great legacy of lessons from the great teachers of history. Of course, the Greatest Teacher of all

is our Lord Jesus. And today's religious educators can also add their own strategies, using the great variety of tools available to them, so that the Gospel can fill the head and hearts of their students, so that they may "be transformed by the renewing of (their) minds, so that (they) may discern what is the will of God" (Romans 12:2).

With love in Christ

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