

Leaven of the Pharisees Sixth Week in Ordinary Time Tuesday, February 19, 2019 Gn 6:5-8; 7:1-5, 10; **Mk 8:14-21** (Our importance is in cooperating with God and living out the gift and the vocation God has given us, not in going on our own path and doing our own thing, even if our own path and our own thing is very religious.)

Today's gospel story presents the disciples as utterly befuddled, and this presages the life of the Church, because **the Church often does not understand the teachings of Christ**. Although it reads them, **it does not see**. Although it hears them, **it does not understand**.

So let us look for a moment at this term Jesus uses "the leaven of the Pharisees." Leaven is an agent put into dough to make it rise, or it's also a term used for an enzyme naturally occurring in grain that causes the grain to ferment. So the rising of dough is a fermentation process. It produces gas, CO2 actually. **So the leaven of the Pharisees is what makes the Pharisees puffed up**, as it were **full** of gas or, in our normal idiom, **of themselves**. Herod also was full of himself, so much so that after he made some extremely irrational promises to a dancing girl he wouldn't retract for fear of losing face. Apparently in his own understanding of himself he was very vulnerable. But what this does in general is **it creates a sort of resistance to change, to understanding, to renewal, to conversion, to grace**.

So Jesus says to his disciples, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees." St. Paul himself talks about how the Lord gave him a thorn in the flesh so that he wouldn't be puffed up, the idea of a thorn piercing a balloon for example, letting out the air. Ultimately what we have to see is that we are merely creatures of God and yet creatures that are made in the image and likeness of God. Therefore **we have a grandeur far beyond anything we could ever accomplish already in our very conception**. And in contrast to that inborn grandeur and greatness and importance **everything we accomplish in life is of very little value**. This does not mean our lives are not important; quite the opposite, **our lives are extremely important. However their importance is in cooperating with God and living out the gift and the vocation God has given us, not in going on our own path and doing our own thing, even if our own path and our own thing is very religious**. So this is the leaven of the Pharisees that we are to guard against.