

## 16<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time – Cycle A

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We have heard on numerous occasions that Ordinary Time is the time we get to learn and to be converted – converted to the will of the Father. Today's readings are probably the most clear about that. In fact there is much to think about in these readings, but all center about the ideas of justice, mercy, repentance and reconciliation. It is after all the age old struggle for good over evil. The age old struggle of every one facing the challenge, after all there are no spectators in life! And as we look deeper, yes there is justice, but there is even more mercy. It may seem odd sometimes to hear and be encouraged to contemplate. After all, the rationalists of our secular society say everything can be explained by our intellect. But then they fall into the ditch. They want to exclude faith, the very place we find the Spirit who talks in the language of our hearts not necessarily of our minds. So yes we need to contemplate, to inform our wills to seek the Good, to seek God. It is built into us.

Our first reading from Wisdom, informs us that God shows His power by condemning sin, especially in those who know better (for example, when those who know Him act arrogantly). When God condemns sin, He is just. Yet God's power, justice, and mercy are one, so He judges with clemency and governs with leniency. "Love and truth will meet; justice and peace will kiss" as we heard in the Psalm (Ps 85:11). Since God acts this way, then a similar quality ought to be practiced by all mankind: by His way of dealing with his people Israel, God taught that "those who are just must be kind." Since the God who has originally revealed Himself to Israel is the only true God and since He is both all-powerful and all good, it is inconceivable that He would not become the God of everyone on earth. Thus, "All the nations you have made shall come and worship you, O LORD, and glorify your name." This prophecy has come true in Christ and His Church, whose mission is to bring the Gospel to all peoples. So the obstacle, then and now, is the weakness of God's servants: we follow the easy path so we sin and so we need God's "pity" and we are weak and so need God's "strength." In spite of our weakness and failings, and above all, God wants what is best for us. When we want what God wants, or at least want to want what God wants, deep down the Holy Spirit expresses it within us. So even though we don't "know how to pray as we ought," the Holy Spirit prays for us, asking for what is best – for us – for all of us at the same time.

In the Gospel reading from Matthew of the parable of the weeds in the field, Our Lord is revealing something that "has lain hidden from the foundation of the world." God wants men to be morally good so as to be children of the kingdom and one day "shine like the sun". God helps us, first because we are good seed and because he has planted us in his kingdom. Yet many by their actions are morally evil and therefore become children of the evil one and will one day suffer in "the fiery furnace, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth." This latter fate will be deserved because in the kingdom of God they have been those "who cause others to sin and [are] evildoers." This parable provides an answer to why God permits some evil. The Master in the parable says, "if you pull up the weeds you might uproot the wheat along with them." God does not uproot every evil now because to do so would do greater harm than good. One reason God permits on-going evil is that those who do evil and cause others to sin can repent. In addition, those who are "good seed" also need time to work out their salvation. Another reason we can see in this parable is the fact each and every one of us needs to accept the will of the Father. Therefore each and every one of us must push back the challenges of the weeds on a personal level. This is our work to bring the kingdom of God to our place and our time.

In another way, it could be said, that some wheat stalks want the weeds around them and yes some Christians flirt with sin deluding themselves they are strong enough on their own to resist the glamour of sin.

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That is why in the Lords' prayer we ask for the Lord to "lead us not into temptation". The mature believer realizes this and stays away from living compromised lives. Ultimately, we are either "weeds" because we do evil and follow the devil or "wheat" because we do "good" and follow God. Yet in reality we were chosen for all time to be the good seed planted in God's garden, but we have always to make the choice to be wheat or weeds and some of us choose to become weeds. God lets us be what we want to be, but always offers us help to be good if we want that. We are choosing either the most terrible fate or the best possible fate. It is up to us.

All the metaphors we hear in today's messages have formed the teachings of The Church and so we can see how we can get practical and valuable lessons from the catechism from these readings. We hear that the judgment at the moment of death, every man will receive "his eternal recompense in his immortal soul." This is the particular judgment by Christ (CCC 1051). We also find "Those who will shine like the sun are "the multitude of those gathered around Jesus and Mary in Paradise [who form] the Church of heaven, where in eternal blessedness they see God as he is . . ." (CCC 1053)." "Following the example of Christ, the Church warns the faithful of the 'sad and lamentable reality of eternal death' (GCD 69), also called 'hell'" (CCC 1056). The burning and wailing and grinding of teeth is the punishment "of eternal separation from God in whom alone man can have the life and happiness for which he was created and for which he longs" (CCC 1057). However, both the Church and Christ, want no one to be lost, and for God "all things are possible" (CCC 1058). Also, "on the Day of Judgment all men will appear in their own bodies before Christ's tribunal to render an account of their own deeds" (CCC 1059). The Last Judgment "calls men to conversion" now, since everyone who hears about it, as Christ told the crowd the parable of the weeds, still has time. Right now, for us therefore, this is "the acceptable time, ... the day of salvation." This truth should inspire in us "a holy fear of God" or at least a fear of being separated from Him for all time. This truth should encourage a commitment "to the justice of the Kingdom of God," that is - to live the Gospel. (CCC 1041).

So what did we hear today that is practical and necessary for our spiritual lives? God so much wants us, His chosen people, to do "good" and stop doing evil. He wants us to choose the "good" always. He wants us to choose His will over our own short term and temporal "good" which many times is not. He wants us to be with him forever but of our own free will. Therefore, we need to do something to get there – we need to choose good all the time. There is immediacy to this desire of God. Now is the acceptable time to do so. Not the past which is over and not the future which may never come. Thus we heard the parable of the wheat and weeds. Even though God is merciful, He gives us time and gives us grace, we can make ourselves into weeds because we individually exercise our free will but we can also choose to be the wheat. We can choose God or the evil one. We can choose ourselves over God. So this is why the Church recommends frequent reception of the sacraments - to strengthen us to choose to be the wheat and not the weeds. This is why our bishop asked all of his priests not too long ago to add additional times in their parishes for the sacrament of reconciliation. That is why Fr David started the first Wednesday Confessions after work. That is why John Paul II recommended as essential, a daily examination of conscience and frequent reception of the sacrament of confession, even to monthly if not more. The time for the kingdom is nearer than we may want to believe, but we have the gift of this time to convince our hearts to go after the "good", to be the wheat and shed all that makes us weeds.