

## SIXTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

*Gospel: Matthew 13:24-43*

Jesus put before them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?' He answered, 'An enemy has done this.' The slaves said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' But he replied, 'No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.'"

He put before them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches." He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened." Jesus told the crowds all these things in parables; without a parable he told them nothing. This was to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet: "I will open my mouth to speak in parables; I will proclaim what has been hidden from the foundation of the world."

Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples approached him, saying, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field." He answered, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!"

### REFLECTION 1: WISE DISCERNMENT (WHEAT & DARNEL)

In Shakespeare's 'Hamlet', Polonius speaks of the value of true friends. He says that once we have proven and tested them, we should never lose them. He tells Laertes, his son, to bind them to his soul with 'hoops of steel'. These good friends are the wheat, and they may be our salvation. Other people are the evil weeds. We have grown up in their midst. At the end of time, today's Gospel tells us, the weeds will be gathered up for burning and the good wheat will be gathered into the barn. May we be counted among the good, to shine like the sun in the Kingdom of God.

The parable in today's Gospel (Matt 13: 24-33) would be familiar to a Palestinian audience; a weed called the bearded darnel was one of the curses a farmer had to endure. In the early stages the darnel so closely resembled the wheat that it was impossible to distinguish one from the other. When both had produced seed heads it was easy to distinguish them, but by that time the roots of the darnel and wheat had so intertwined that the darnel could not be weeded out without tearing the wheat out as well. Both must be left to grow until harvest time. In the end the wheat had to be laboriously separated from it. The consequences were serious as the darnel seed is slightly poisonous. In ancient times sowing seeds among a growing crop was a criminal act. Even to this day in India, one of the direst threats one can make to an enemy is 'I will sow bad seed in your field'.

There is always a temptation within a community for it to become the church of the squeaky clean, a church of the elite and this parable poses such a temptation. 'Do you want us to go and weed out the darnel?' 'No', said Jesus, 'because when you weed out the darnel you might pull up the wheat with it'. It is quite clear that Jesus is interested above all in saving the good grain. He wants to give the wheat every possible chance.

In this life no-one can pretend to adopt the attitude that divides everything into two distinct categories; good and evil, truth and error. Heresy itself can have a grain of truth and the true teaching can contain traces of error. We must practice the difficult art of discernment - a question of uniting two apparently contradictory attitudes, wanting to be the wheat and at the same time taking a stand against the world and its desires.

The second virtue the parable would have us cultivate is patience - to rein in that impulsive desire to sort out before the end of time only those called to the kingdom. Though we must hate vice, we must never cease to love people. See how Jesus was rebuked by the Pharisees as being a 'friend of publicans and sinners'. In another parable Jesus assures us that the tiny mustard seed, lost in the broad acres of the world, will grow little by little until it becomes an immense tree of the kingdom, alive to the song of birds. For Matthew, too hasty action against the weak brother or sister, even if they are sinners, is bad.

## **REFLECTION 2: THE ACT OF AN ENEMY**

The picture in this parable (Matthew 13: 24-43) would be familiar to a Palestinian audience. A weed called the bearded darnel was one of the curses a farmer had to endure. In the early stages darnel so closely resembled wheat that it was impossible to distinguish one from the other. When both had produced seed heads it was easy to distinguish them; but by that time, their roots were so intertwined that the darnel could not be weeded out without tearing the wheat out as well. Both must be left to grow until the harvest time. In the end wheat had to be laboriously separated from it, the consequences were serious, as the darnel seed is slightly poisonous. In ancient times, sowing seeds among a growing crop was a criminal act. Even to this day in India, one of the direst threats which someone can make to an enemy is 'I will sow bad seed in your field'.

There is always the temptation within a community for it to become a Church of the pure, a Church of the elite. The parable of the darnel presupposes such a temptation. 'Do you want us to go and weed out the darnel?' 'No' said Jesus, 'because when you weed out the darnel you might pull up the wheat with it'. It is quite clear that Jesus is interested above all in saving the good grain. He wants to give the wheat every possible chance. In this life nobody can pretend to adopt that attitude that divides everything into two distinct categories; good and evil, truth and error. Heresy itself can have its grain of truth and the true teaching can contain traces of error. As Gerard McGinty once wrote 'It is possible to sense the presence of an angel and yet scent the devil'. We must practice the difficult art of discernment – a question of uniting two apparently contradictory attitudes – wanting to be the wheat and at the same time taking a stand against the 'world' and its desires.

The second virtue the parable would have us cultivate is patience – to rein in that impulsive desire to sort out before the end of time, those called to the kingdom. Though we must hate vices, we must never cease to love people. See how Jesus was rebuked by the Pharisees as he was identified as being a friend of publicans and sinners'. Jesus assures us that the tiny mustard seed, lost in the broad acres of the world will grow, little by little, until it becomes an immense tree of the kingdom, alive to the song of birds. For Matthew; too hasty action against the weak brother or sister, even if they are sinners, is bad. The best thing is to wait and allow the Lord to exercise the final judgement.