

Homily for July 18, 1999
16th Sunday in Ordinary Time Cycle A

By Father Charles Bowes

Wisdom 12:13, 16-19
Romans 8:26-27
Matthew 13:24-43

In God's good time all things are made right.

Ah, the parable of the weeds in the field...Matthew chapter 13 has been used to justify destroying Protestants and to encourage hatred of ourselves. Meditating on the nature of good and evil in her own life, Kathleen Norris writes these words: "I am not a good person or notably evil on the human continuum, but one who struggles with ordinary yet dangerous temptations to anger and revenge, to pride and greed, the fool's gold of vain glory, and the improper manipulation of other people to further my own ends. You name it; it's all there. I don't know much about how to deal with my own evil, but I have learned enough to recognize that sometimes all I can do is pray."

Our gospel, Matthew 13, asks us to redefine the role of weeds in our lives and to have faith that the unseen God exists even in the weeds. Why is it so hard for us to do that?

Growing up in North America, we are trained to react to weeds with loathing and disgust, not just in

our garden, but in our social world and in ourselves. Weeds are culturally defined as whatever group is currently outcast: Blacks, Jews, Hispanics, Gays and women have all been designated weeds at one time or another.

And we each have our own inner weeds, our own character defects that may be genetic or biographically caused. Perhaps we are alcoholics, addicts, perfectionists, procrastinators; or we may just live in a world of fear that paralyzes our growth.

As long as we are afraid to look at and embrace our own cultural and personal weeds we will continue to exterminate them. As a nation and as individuals, we will self-medicate with substances like drugs and alcohol, with behaviors like sex addiction, or even commit murder or suicide rather than acknowledge imperfection.

In his insightful commentary on the gospel on St. Matthew, Daniel Patte notes that in the parable of the wheat and the weeds, "One cannot become a disciple...as long as one thinks that one's proper vocation should be primarily negative, judgmental and a vocation to fight evil." We are not to act like the servants, but we are to become disciples. We are not to focus on the weeds and how we are to root them out. We are to attend to the growth of both wheat and

weeds together. Some cultures believe that our soul chooses defects so that their opposite quality (character assets) can be learned and a healthier synthesis emerge; that our souls ask for weakness so that we might discover the path to great strength. We do not make ourselves perfect by our own efforts, rather perfection is a gift we receive in the measure of our humility – just as we receive the holy food and one another here to become the Body of Christ – God’s good work.

Among the fifth century desert fathers was Abbot John the dwarf. He prayed mightily that the Lord would take away all of his passions. When his prayer was answered, Abbot John went to see a wise man named Abbot Pastor. “You see before you a man who is completely free of all temptations,” John said. To which Abbot Pastor replied, “Pray for some struggle to be stirred up in you, for the soul is matured only in battles.” Chastened, Abbot John did as he was instructed and prayed for the strength to endure whatever combat came his way.

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