

**St. Ann's Church – Washington, DC**

**16<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time Year A – July 19, 2020**

**Homily by Msgr. Watkins, Pastor**

My dear Parishioners and Friends of St. Ann's Church here in Washington, DC.

I greet all of you who join us in the pews today as we continue to re-open gradually and accommodate parishioners who return to Mass, and to those who join us by way of electronic media today, I welcome you and invite you to participate in spiritual communion with us on this Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time.

We've been speaking about Mystery a good deal these last weeks. Our Catholic Faith is filled with ancient Mysteries: the Most Holy Trinity, the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mystery of the Motherhood of God, the Mystery of the Incarnation, the Mystery of the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus, the Mystery of Salvation, the Mystery of Divine Providence, the Mystery of the Priesthood, the Mystery of Faith. So many Mysteries, imbued with intelligence, meaning, and wisdom, and all revealed in so many ways by Jesus who is truly God and truly Man – which is quite a Mystery in itself! And today, we are presented with another ancient mystery, the Mystery of Good and Evil represented by the Parable of the Weeds and the Wheat in Matthew's Gospel. And as we've said before, we can't always figure out completely a Mystery, but that doesn't mean that the Mystery of Good and Evil isn't ripe with intelligence and meaning and truth. Remember, all Mysteries are revealed by Jesus and then developed by His Church. So, let's take a look at the Mystery of Good and Evil for a moment and see if there's any intelligence to this one.

Now, for starters, I like to garden – always have. Here at St. Ann's Church in Washington we have created some beautiful landscaping and gardens. Realtor friends tell me that the first impression is the most important when it comes to property sales. If it looks good outside, it probably looks inviting inside. So, we do a lot of curb appeal here to make things inviting and welcoming to people who might say, "That church looks beautiful on the outside. Somebody obviously

cares. Maybe I might like to step inside and see more.” Maybe they’ll find what I hope you find here: a beautiful garden of faith, hope and love; a refuge of prayer; a place of rest in the Lord, a beacon of joy and good news.

Which is why when it comes to gardening and things of that nature, I must say that I don’t like weeds! They’re nasty and, if left unchecked, they can take over. Weeds do nothing for gardens but make them look unattractive. They can even choke off the flowers and plants and wreck everything. I don’t like weeds at all! Given a hint of my own obsessive-compulsive personality trait, I like pulling up weeds. If I see even the tiniest of weeds out there, I have my eye on it, and for those stubborn weeds at curbside or sidewalks or the parking lot, I use a lot of Round Up! Get those weeds! Pull them up! Get rid of them! And just when I think those weeds are finally gone, I’m amazed how fast they return. There just doesn’t seem to be an end to weeds in the garden. It drives me nuts sometimes!

Well, for that reason, when our divine Lord instructs His disciples NOT to pull up the weeds, lest the wheat might also be pulled up also, I have to say that this is one of the Parables in the Gospel that I have never liked! I just don’t get the point. I mean I DO understand that the Wheat in the Parable represents the fruit of good people and that the Weeds in the Parable represent the evil people in the world. So, it would seem to me logically that we should be trying to rid the garden of Weeds (evil) so that the Wheat (good) might flourish more and more. Isn’t that the point of life in a general way: To promote the good and seek to eliminate the evil? So, it would seem reasonable to pull out those weeds, to get rid of those weeds! Why allow the evil (the Weeds) to co-exist with the good (the Wheat)? That’s seemingly unreasonable, illogical, just plain non-sense. Or is it? Here we are presented with what we’ve described before as a real Mystery: the problem of Good and Evil, a classic philosophical topic and relevant in every age, perhaps particularly today in which we see so much evil in the midst of good all around us. Well, our Lord’s instruction suggests that MY logic is not on board. So, if I trust His Words, then I have to think differently. And because it is our divine Lord speaking here in the Gospel, there is no deception, no lie, no falsehood. So, we’ve got to probe a bit more to understand the Mystery of Good and Evil.

You and I know good people in our lives, and perhaps we also know evil people who have crossed our path. Maybe even now you’re in a relationship with somebody who is not so good to you, maybe someone who’s really hurt you in

the past or even now is making life very hard because of their abusive words or actions. Maybe you've been emotionally or physically abused and don't know how to get out of that antagonistic relationship. It's hard to live with people who are evil. And, of course, there are gradations of evil – some more or less evil, but still evil in some way, shape, or form. Like weeds, evil shows itself across a wide spectrum of dysfunctional thought and behavior. When this dysfunctional thought and behavior is freely chosen, we call that in our Judaic-Christian tradition, "sin." And sin is an evil. Now, there are people who DO evil but don't know that what they're doing IS evil. They really think that they are doing Good, not Evil. And, in our contemporary day, it's hard to say to someone, "Heh, friend, your choices are really hurting others and even yourself." With such gross relativism in the contemporary garden of Good and Evil, what appears as Good to someone is Evil to another, and vice-versa. The popular opinion in this secular garden is that the objective distinction between Wheat and Weeds (Good and Evil) is actually irrelevant. It's all about ME and as I see things! Left unchecked, we call that radical subjectivism actually narcissism – and that is diagnostically a real mental and emotional problem, even deprivation, and when chosen and entertained, a real evil, a sin.

But, as I said, there are a lot of people who subjectively THINK they are doing good when, objectively they are not. And this is why our Lord is gentle with most of us who probably don't choose to do Evil for Evil's sake, but are often confused or misinformed, even misguided or malformed, to think that we ARE doing good, when in fact we're not. See, this is where a lot of things get blurred from the perspective of the person as an individual subject with his or her own conscience which may or may not be well informed. So, there are a lot of Weeds out there who think they're just like the Wheat. They don't understand that there really is an objective standard or standards which can say, "This is true OR that is false." When it comes to people and the way they might have been formed through good and evil experiences, family upbringing, education, and the consequences of their choices – all of that can get so confusing that the line between good and evil (between Wheat and Weed) is often blurry for many people. Now, these are essentially well-intentioned people but they don't know what is truly good --- and the evidence of that is that so often they're not happy, not joyful, perhaps often angry with themselves and others and seeking to escape all of that with a life that doesn't lead them to greater truth but to dissipation and maybe even self-

destructive behaviors which end up hurting themselves and hurting others. See, there are a lot of people like that with whom we live and work in the Church and in Society. We live with them, and not because we really enjoy their company, but we might not have a realistic option. Living with antagonistic parents, children, spouses, neighbors, teachers, politicians, journalists, aunts and uncles, even mothers-in-law, among others, can be very tough; sometimes those relationships are so deprived of goodness, thus, dysfunctionally evil. Yet we live all of that. We put up with all of that. We TOLERATE all of that, rather we tolerate and put up with THEM. See, we're concerned here about Persons, so we don't want to say that we put up with all of THAT, but rather that we put up with all of THEM. And what's important here is that we don't have to approved of WHAT they do as much as we seek to LOVE them, even if we can't LIKE them.

And this is critical in the distinction Jesus is making in the Parable. I don't have to LIKE the many Weeds (evil persons) in my life, but I am called to LOVE those Weeds because if I don't LOVE them, I will HATE them and them start pulling them apart, killing them with my own set of abusive words and actions. Ironically, I will become what THEY are. Their sickness can become MY sickness. Their emotional or physical or moral sickness (certain evils) can make me sick, too. But I have to live with them. I have to work with them. I have to care for them. I have to pay their bills and put up with their non-sense NOT because I necessarily like WHAT they do, but rather WHO they are. Aside from all their evils, somehow deep-down they are persons made in the image and likeness of God who may have lost some of the original beauty by their choices in life, even their sins. And our Lord tells us to keep those Weeds close to us (or as close as we can) to show them not we necessarily LIKE them but that we LOVE them.

Now, this is where we get to the heart of the Parable and, I would say, the heart of the Christian Gospel. To LOVE someone whom we don't LIKE helps to solve the Mystery of Good and Evil in our personal lives. See, Christ doesn't condemn anyone; we condemn ourselves. Rather, He shows tremendous, infinite patience, with us. That word, "Patience," comes from a Latin word, "Passus," meaning "Passion, or Suffering." In other words, Jesus shows incredible Passionate love, a Suffering Love, for us. We might even say that He shows us a COMPASSIONATE love for us, clearly manifest on the Cross. There, our Savior puts up with, tolerates, endures all of our evils, all of the Weeds in the world from the dawn of

time to the end of the ages. I personally wouldn't have been so patient, so passionate, so compassionate, so Good. Then I have to remember that I have my own Weeds within my very own soul which I may find hard to pull out and uproot. That's why I need a gardener to do that for me. That's the reason by I need a Savior. See, I can't save myself from my own Weeds, let alone all of those other Weeds in my life. As much as I might try and think that I can control every weed in my own little garden of good and evil, that's when I have (in the paradox of life) actually lost control of my garden. He says, "Let the weeds grow up with the wheat." In other words, be gentle with those Weeds, those problematic (even sinful) persons in your life. Be patient with them, be passionately in LOVE with them, be COMPASSIONATELY in LOVE with them. Suffer your love for them, as Jesus suffered His divine Love for you and for me and for all, for every Wheat and every Weed in this universe which Adam and Eve began to mess up by introducing the poor choice for evil over good and thereby infected that first garden with the Weed of Original Sin.

In the end, we have a true gardener, Jesus, with His helpers, Mary and the Angels and the Saints, to do a lot of the work for us. Now, when it's all over at the end of the physics of time, there will be no need for His patience. It's all over. Then, the divine gardener has to do the just thing and separate the good from the evil and put all the powers of evil (including Satan and even death itself) into submission. The garden will be perfectly beautiful, where there can truthfully be no evil, no Weeds, just pure grain Wheat. So, we have to let THE gardener of our lives do His job here. It's not up to me to solve all the evils of the world, let alone to solve all of the evils of the people who cross my paths. God knows, they're probably thinking the same thing about me!! Can you imagine that?!!

So, then, dear friends, we come to the Wheat, the goodness in our lives, and we come to the Wheat which makes the Bread of Life, the holy Eucharist. Here in the garden of this sanctuary, we enter into the full Mystery once again of the Life, Death, and Resurrection of the God-Man who entered a garden the night before He died amidst so many weeds and thorns and who is raised from the dead three days later in another garden. In this garden here, in this holy place, our divine Gardener puts up with us who are a mix of Wheat and Weed, of goodness and evil, of Grace and Sin. He let's all of that within us and in our world grow together for His purpose, so that LOVE, truly His Passion, His Suffering, His divine love and

mercy might abound through us who proclaim the Mystery of Faith: Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again!

So many Mysteries to seek to understand. So, watch those weeds. If you see them in another or especially within yourself, be gentle, be patient, and hire the professional, divine gardener, Jesus, who knows how to work things for you and for the many, so that sins may be forgiven.

God love you.