

July 19, 2020
Sixteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time

One of the struggles that many people face in their lives is the question of evil. How could God who is good, allow bad things to happen to those who love God? Jesus's teaching found in the parable of the weeds and the wheat provides us with help in understanding the profoundly difficult challenge, a challenge that especially in our age has caused people to give up on God and to give up on the Church.

Jesus says that a man sows good seeds in the field. All goodness comes from God. The parable reflects what we read in Genesis chapter one where God creates all that is and pronounces it as good. In chapter three, an enemy, in the form of a serpent, plants the seed of doubt into the hearts of Adam and Eve. They fall for the lies of the serpent and disobey God and through that sin, suffering, evil and death enter into the world. In the parable when the slave asks, "Where did the weeds come from?" Jesus makes very clear that "An enemy has done this." The slave then asks if they should pull up the weeds, and Jesus gives a surprising answer, "No, if you pull up the weeds you might uproot the wheat along with them." That is the tension with which we live with Kingdom of God in this life that is "already here, but not yet." The parable also speaks to the Kingdom of God that is not yet, that is to come fully at harvest time, the symbol for the end of time. Then, the weeds will be separated from the wheat and the weeds will be burned and the wheat will be gathered into barns. The parable makes clear that on this earth Jesus's victory over sin and death by his cross and resurrection established his Kingdom on earth. He destroyed the power that sin, suffering and death once held over us. Even when we fall into sin and experience suffering and death, we are victorious with Christ if we remain with him. The battle is won, but we are still cleaning up the mess. Everything that is messy, all the weeds will be burned away one day.

Why did God create us as weak human beings capable of sinning, which when we fell into sin, opened up the door to the mess of evil, suffering and death? God who is love, created us in love. Love can never be coerced. God freely chose to make us in his own image and likeness, and so gave us complete freedom to say yes or no to his plan of love. We chose to say no and God continues to say yes and most especially through his Son Jesus. Jesus's life was a complete and perfect

“yes” to his Father. He struggled at times to say yes. In the garden of Gethsemane Jesus begged in the midst of his agony to let this cup pass, and his final prayer was, “Let not my will, but only your will be done.” On the cross, he cried out, “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?” His last words were, “Into your hands I commend my spirit.”

Six years ago on my first Sunday at St. Louise, I shared that I planned to turn the hard, rocky soil of the back yard of the rectory into a garden. With the help of Jeff and Becky Hummer and the high school youth mission trekkers, I did exactly that and for several years and had a good harvest from that garden. I gave tomatoes, cucumbers, lettuce and carrots. Not this year. I also said that I wanted to take the good work for the former pastors of St. Louise and make a more beautiful garden of faith and you, the people of God clearly said in the parish survey that did in my first year here that you wanted to grow in faith. For some reason, this year the garden, despite my best efforts looks sick. Seminarian Brody joked that maybe it caught COVID-19. There have been some things that I have tried as pastor to “fertilize the soil of faith” in our parish, which seemed to work for a while and now seem to not to be working as I had hoped. One of those is the Christ Renews His Parish retreat weekend experience. People who went on the weekend had a wonderful experience, but now it seems to have run its course. Slowly, the numbers of people who attend Mass have gone down, slowly the numbers of students in our school continue to decline. Now we are trying to figure out how to be faithful disciples in the midst of a pandemic. Not to mention people wondering what the next school year will look like, the struggles that people have faced at home, the people who have lost jobs. Where is God in all of this?

From outward appearances, it can feel like the weeds are gaining on the wheat. Jesus reminds us to not lose hope when life becomes messy. Keep focused on Jesus, who as we heard in last week’s parable, casts the good seed broadly and lets it fall on rocks and shallow soil, and among the thorns as well as good ground. God permits the weeds to grow only so as not to do undue harm to the wheat. One wise person once said, “All shall be well and if all is not well, then it is not the end.”

