

**19 July 2020**

**Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

*Wisdom 12:13-16-19*

I used to really love this parable. It gave me reassurance that I would never be perfect and that was OK. As one confessor told me, **paying too much attention to your chronic weakness and sins can actually interfere with God's plans for you.** God wants you to shine through a joyful and generous life, and always looking inward and feeling bad about your faults makes that pretty hard! I loved hearing Paul Tillich's **definition of personal salvation: "Accepting the fact that you are accepted."** I love St. Ignatius of Loyola's definition of the human person: a "loved sinner." These lines interpret the Parable of the Weeds and the Wheat in a beautiful way, assurance us that even with the "weeds" in our lives, with our imperfections and our sins, God loves us and accepts the good and the bad in us.

It made sense with interpersonal issues also. If something really bothered me about someone else, the Parable advised me to, in the words of Paul McCartney, **"Let it be."** You can't control another person, so let the weeds and the wheat grow together. Or, I remember some situations in my first priest assignment where someone got very upset with something I said or did, and Fr. Bill Matzek would listen and then often just say, "I wouldn't get to shook about it." Or as a staff member said at prayer last week, "There will always be people in our lives that are troublesome to us. **Fretting too much about them will eat us up; the wheat will come up with the weeds.**" There's freedom in letting the weeds and the wheat grow together and letting go of the need for personal perfection or relationships that are always neat and tidy. The parable tells us there will be weeds, and that's OK for now—we don't have to panic and try to make everything perfect, pull out every last weed, BECAUSE that might come at the cost of our personal peace and charity and good will toward all.

It made sense even with social issues of the day. I remember that story which was repeated during our parish virtual retreat in June that **John XXIII**, pope from 1958-1963, used to work really hard on really important issue that had little resolution. Problems in the Church, problems in the world with a nuclear arms race. It is said that he would unload these burdens with his last prayer of the night, saying, **"Lord, I did my best to deal with all these problems, but it's your Church, and your world, I hand it back to you. Good night."** It reminds me of a rather famous Church quote—I've seen it attributed to both St. Augustine and St. Ignatius Loyola—that we should "Work as though it all depended on ourselves, but pray as though everything depended on God."

So, I really liked this parable because it revealed these true things that helped me accept flawed life and move ahead with confidence. As one pastoral council member said last week, "We have to tolerate the bad with the good." That certainly is a clear message in the Gospel parable, I think.

**This year, however**, maybe because of so much social upheaval in recent weeks and months, **I'm aware that there are also situations that we should not tolerate so quickly.** What if there is something in you or in me that really ends up hurting others or deadening our souls? An addiction, or any pattern of behavior that sucks the life out of us and those around us. Is this a case of just let the weeds and the wheat grow together? Or if someone is abusive toward us or others, is that just something to "let be"? Remember that Jesus himself when contemplated to the evil of someone leading one of these "little ones" into harm, it would be better for that one to have a millstone tied around his neck and dropped into the sea. That's not a very tolerant attitude when it comes to people hurting children. Or what about some great social issues of the day? Abortion: are the deaths of so many unborn human lives

something to “let be”? or the continuing suffering that racism afflicts on people of color? Let it be? It’s hard to square that with a “Love your neighbor” ethic.

So what do we do? Can you feel the tension I’m trying to express? When is tolerating good and holy and when is it an excuse for putting up with something that needs to change?

Maybe the heart of the parable is this: Not to turn a blind eye to but **to be careful how we go about challenging that evil. It has to be done with love**, or we’ll lose our soul in the process. To change ourselves, don’t hate any part of yourself but love it all with compassion, make friends with the sinner within as a way of weakening sin’s power. To change our relationships, have compassion first and realize there are reasons people are the way they are and if we knew those reasons we would understand more. And in the social issues of our day, have compassion, don’t demonize, try to understand while speaking your truth with love. Then what is most Christ-like in you, the wheat, will remain fully rooted.