

### **July 19, 2020 Good And Bad Seed Homily:**

A true story: Several years ago, the pastor of a local Catholic church voiced his frustration that so many of his parishioners were consistently arriving late for Sunday Mass. By their tardiness, he reasoned, they dishonored God and failed to set a good example for the youth of the parish. He raged from the pulpit and threatened the latecomers with damnation if they persisted in turning up late for Mass. He could no longer tolerate such rudeness. One Sunday he instructed the ushers to lock the doors of the church once Mass commenced. Reluctantly, the ushers obeyed. As expected, several parishioners were unable to enter the church. But on the following Sunday the doors were once again opened for the duration of the Mass. The pastor may have had a change of heart, and for good reason. One of the latecomers locked out of church the previous Sunday was the local fire marshal. Ouch!

By that time the damage had already been done. Many of those who were humiliated never returned to the church for Mass again.

In the parable of the Wheat and the Weeds from Matthew's thirteenth chapter, the key question is addressed to the master of the household by his servants. "Do you want us to go and pull up the weeds?" In a call to exercise patience, the master replied, "Let them (the wheat and the weeds) grow together until the harvest". Pulling up the weeds meant certain death for the weeds and the wheat since the crops are intertwined. Simply wait.

In the Church bad and good seed grow together. The household of God is a mixed crop of saints and sinners, of the righteous and unrighteous. We would do well to remember that Our Lord tolerated the presence of Judas who betrayed him among the Twelve Apostles.

Almost every day negative reports in the mainstream and cable media remind us that there are many poisonous weeds among the faithful next to the good wheat sown by Christ. Though regrettable, scandals are inevitable. After the eminent Jewish psychiatrist Karl Stern was baptized, his brother protested his decision, which he considered inexplicable. "As an educated man, how can you possibly claim membership in a church whose members include such notorious characters as Adolf Hitler and the gangster Al Capone", he asked. Today's parable affords him one answer.

The master knows that his patience will be rewarded at the harvest. As long as the Kingdom is growing, it remains possible to change from weed into wheat.

One fascinating interpretation of this parable is illustrated by the Italian painter, Domenico Fetti, who lived in the early Seventeenth Century. In the foreground of his painting, three servants of the master are sound asleep. In the background a shadowy figure is at work. The artist shows the menacing power of evil while the good are sleeping. Even the leaves and the trees feel the disturbance. Threatening dark clouds are in the air. Remarkably, it is still day time. The enemy is not identified. He could very well be a member of the master's own household. His point is that the enemies of the Church are hard at work crippling the Church and Her mission while the faithful remain oblivious to the danger, and are in a state of slumber.

Saint Augustine reminds us that bad people have been found everywhere but the bad will not reign forever.

As Christ's disciples, we must wait until God brings this of age, and leave the separating of the wheat and the weeds to him. In view of this parable let us consider the words of St. Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians:

Do not pass judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then every man will receive his commendation from him. (I Cor. 4:3)

Amen!