

During our seminary formation, each seminarian is advised to choose a good spiritual director. These Spiritual directors are usually priests, nuns or lay people who have a reputation of being a good and holy person. They are trustworthy people who would keep your sharing confidentially and so seminarians would be quite comfortable in sharing their personal and spiritual struggles. I remember once going to my spiritual director and shared with him how I was struggling with some issues. I remember saying to him that I was finding it difficult to get over this particular evil in me and I just want to get rid of it. The more I tried the more it became obvious it was staying. It was frustrating and I wanted a solution. My spiritual director took a long look at me and then smiled. He then said, "welcome to the club. Join the long list of strugglers starting with St Paul who said: 'I want to do good, but I end up doing the very thing I don't want to.'"

Evil is very much present in us and in the world. Jesus's message today confirms the same. Can you get rid of evil at once? Should evil be tolerated or accommodated? The scandal of God's patience and forbearance with wrongdoers appears again in the Gospel. The kingdom of heaven is compared to a farmer who is confronted with a serious problem: his field is alive with wheat and a poisonous weed, darnel, which can only be distinguished from the wheat when the growth is advanced. The farmer's servants want to weed out the darnel, but the farmer tells them to leave it alone; he is worried that uprooting the weeds will endanger the wheat. He orders that no premature attempt be made to separate them. Thus, both the wheat and the darnel are allowed to grow, and only at the final harvest are they separated.

Jesus today is asking us to share in the same spirit of God and act with kindness to our fellow human beings. The argument is that God's leniency will give the people of Israel the good hope that when they wrong God, they too will surely benefit from his forgiveness. This same hope is enshrined in the Our Father: "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us."

The message of the parable is something that Jesus lived throughout his ministry. He reached out to all sorts of people, mixing with whores, priests, crooks, scribes, politicians, tax collectors. Religious separatism was something Jesus refused to advocate, making it his business to seek out and save the lost. The Pharisees, whose very name means "the separated ones", criticised him for associating with the wrong crowd. But Jesus knew that all communities are a mixture of the good and bad, the crooked and the cracked. And, further, that it isn't always easy to tell which is which. In the end Jesus is the one weeded out by the authorities and thrown onto the killing fields.

We as individuals or a community of believers do not have the right to pass judgement on others. The Church is not God. As Christians we have no authority to pronounce the final judgement on anyone. The last word cannot be said about anyone until death, and then it is God's part, not ours, to say it. Paul underlines the same point when he tells the church in Corinth: "There must be no passing of premature judgement. Leave that until the Lord comes" (1 Corinthians 4:5).

On a personal level, let us be thankful that God gives us all an opportunity to change. It is his hope that our weeds might one day change into good wheat. As Christians we should neither be surprised at nor unaware of the presence of evil in us and in the community. At the same time, we must never forget the grace of God alive in us to continue to be good. Remember in our Gospel today we have the parable of the yeast. The grace of God's goodness alive in us and always demanding change must be brought to our memory more often than not. It is this power of God's grace alive within us that makes us children of grace.

The kingdom of God comes with limitless grace in the face of evil in and around us. It is this grace we depend on to change our weeds into good wheat that is life giving. God has the power to turn weed into wheat. Take for example, Peter, the apostle. He was a rough fisherman who even after having been chosen by Jesus, denied him three times. Yet, the forgiveness of Jesus brings him salvation and he becomes the ambassador for Christ, even giving his life for the Gospel. St Paul and countless number of men and women who had led lives filled with evil had then gone on to become messengers of hope and new life. We too can turn around and make our lives witnesses of the good news if we can surrender ourselves to the Lord and let him take over. The power of the grace of God is enough to turn our weeds into live giving wheat. We can encounter this grace in our prayer. Please spend quality time in prayer, which we have plenty these days, and seek to commune with our God. May we immerse ourselves in that grace as we seek to see his face in prayer.