

Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time / Year A / July 19, 2020 (Fr. Giese)

In our gospel passage today, Jesus uses tells a short story to explain the presence of evil in the world and why it exists alongside of the good. In Jesus' parable, a man sows wheat in his field. An enemy of his, however, sowed weeds among the wheat. Pulling out the weeds would endanger the wheat so they are allowed to grow together until the time of harvest. At that point they wheat and the weeds will be separated. The wheat will be gathered into the man's barn while the weeds are to be bundled together for burning.

The point is clear. Jesus is sowing the good seed of righteousness, charity, and love. It takes root in the lives of many people and grows and produces a harvest of goodness. But the evil one sows evil too in the same field and evil also grows and it is destructive and hurtful. The two seeds, wheat and weeds, good and evil, growing together and existing side by side is something we can see in the world all around us and have experienced ourselves directly, I'm sure. There are people who do hurtful, destructive, violent, dishonest, and even depraved things and they make life more difficult and hurtful for others. Sometimes, they even take pride in their destructive and selfish acts and boast of their behavior.

But then there are also people of great charity, decency, love, virtue, and righteousness who make the world better by making it better for other people, sometimes in large ways but most often in little ways. They do so because they choose to do so. Yes, they may have had good example and encouragement but fundamentally they produce what is good because they choose to do so. We have probably all experienced people who fall into one or the other of those two groups; those who do what is hurtful and selfish and destructive and then the other group of people who do what is good, decent, and constructive. But truthfully, we don't have to go far to experience wheat and weeds, good and evil, growing side by side. We have only to look – to ourselves, honestly. Within each of us, there is both, to one amount or another, one degree or another, of wheat and weeds, righteousness and evil, good and bad. Because we are made in the image and likeness of God, we are capable of goodness, drawn to righteousness, able to love and receive love, and to act with virtue. Because we are afflicted with the effect of original sin, we are also capable of deception, hurt, selfishness, animosity, immorality and even violence. We are

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also endowed by God with freedom and are not entirely governed by instinct. We can choose one or the other and we define ourselves by our choices as wheat or weeds, good or evil.

So why choose God and what is good? What do we get out of it if we do? Well, what you get when you choose God and goodness is the fullest life possible. This is what Jesus Christ reveals to us, what is possible in a human life where love of God and love of neighbor and love of self are always chosen. In the human life of Jesus there is nothing lacking. There is no lack of compassion for the suffering and the needy. There is in his human life no lack of respect for the humanity of anyone because of ethnicity, sex, reputation, status, wealth, physical affliction or anything. In Jesus there is no lack of understanding of what is actually important in life and so no getting out of sorts over things that really don't matter that much. In the human life of Jesus there is no lack of self-control in his words or actions, nothing that needed to be undone, no hurt to be repaired, no words to regret or take back. In Jesus there is no lack of courage to defend others and to say what needed to be said and even to suffer and die for the sake of others.

In Jesus' human life there is no lack of direction, or purpose, no lack of prayer and devotion, no lack of charity or mercy; no lack of any good thing because there was nothing lacking in his love for the Father. Jesus shows us what a full human life can be. He offers it to us too and each one of us can have that life by choosing to follow Jesus Christ closely, to unite ourselves to him, to stay close by him.

The weeds don't exist in other people only. They are within us too, always ready to grow and diminish our lives by crowding out the good and righteous lives we might otherwise enjoy. So, we must nourish what is good within us by always staying close to Christ. We must remain always near him when it is easy to do so and especially when it is not. We must listen to him and all that he says, including what is challenging to us. In everything, we must always choose Christ so that we might always choose what is right and good and have, in whatever circumstance we might be, and enjoy the fullness of life God offers to each and every one of us.