

Homily Notes for Sunday, July 19, 2020, 16th in Ordinary Time

Readings: Wisdom 12:13, 16-19, Ps 86:5-6, 9-10, 15-16, Romans 8:26-27, Matthew 13:24-43

Summary: Our theme is patience in pulling weeds out of the Lord's garden. But unlike wheat and weeds, human beings can change. They can change from weeds into good wheat but they can also degrade from good wheat into weeds. As good stewards (disciples) we know that we will be held accountable for the use of our time, talent and treasure in building up and protecting the good people in the Kingdom of God.

1. Our first reading, from the book of Wisdom, reminds us that our God is just as well as kind, all-powerful as well as merciful. The justice means there will be a judgment. The mercy means God will help us be ready. The day will come when we will have to give an account for what we have done with all that He has entrusted to us during our lifetime. We encouraged because of His love and His mercy.

2. Part of the Good News is that we are never alone in this work. We are reminded in our second reading, "The Spirit comes to the aid of our weakness..." We must turn to the Holy Spirit continuously to guide us in our daily lives as disciples of the Lord. The Holy Spirit is the source of all wisdom. He will reveal to each of us the will of the Father for us. And He will give us the strength we need to remain faithful to our mission.

3. In the first parable of today's Gospel reading, Jesus compares the Kingdom of God to a man who sows good wheat in his field, but in the darkness of night an enemy comes and sows weeds in the same field. Both weeds and wheat are permitted to grow and only at the harvest time are they separated, or "judged" – the wheat gathered into the sower's barn and the weeds finally destroyed. So it will be for each of us at the end of our time on earth. It is a sobering reminder of the justice of God.

4. Just a bit of background. This was not an uncommon crime. Roman law provided punishment for someone who did this. The weed, zarsa, looked a lot like wheat but actually was poisonous. If processed with the wheat it would make persons violently ill. But, fortunately, humans are different from plants.

5. The Good News for us is that we can change; we can repent. We can start out as a weed but end up as good wheat if we turn to Jesus and serve Him in our offerings of time, talent and treasure. If we are but faithful stewards of the gifts entrusted to us, the day will come when we "will shine like the sun in the kingdom of [the] Father." If now we seem to be weeds, let us repent, change our lives and become good wheat. God is waiting to help us.

6. Another lesson is that we must be patient. Initially, the wheat and the weeds cannot be distinguished. But by harvest time they can be clearly distinguished. Hence, we must be willing to be patient during the entire growing season (lifetime) because we do not

know until the end of life who really will be good and who will be bad. Patience and then discernment are essential values for the Christian.

7. From altar boy to Pope: “Throw them out! Throw them out!” The year was 1770, and in a small Italian church, two altar boys prepared for Benediction. Annibale Della Genga and Francesco Castiglioni entered the sacristy, put on their albs, and grabbed the heavy brass candlesticks. And then they began to bicker.

Arguing over who would stand on the priest’s right for the procession, their quibble escalated into a shouting match. Alarmed parishioners turned their heads to the back of the church to see the commotion, and that’s when it happened: Castiglioni cracked Della Genga over the head with his candlestick. Blood dripped out of Della Genga’s head, and both boys began shoving each other. Shocked parishioners screamed, “Throw them out! Throw them out!” So the embarrassed priest grabbed the boys, led them to the door, and tossed them out of the church.

8. Now fast-forward several decades to 1825. Half a million people gathered in Rome for the great Jubilee celebration. The Jubilee occurred every 25 years, and its grand climax was the opening of the Holy Door at St. Peter’s Basilica. Traditionally, the Pope would knock on the door three times with a large silver hammer and sing, “Open unto me the gates of justice!” On the third knock, the door would swing open, and the Pope would lead his people through. The symbolism was rich: pilgrims from all over the world coming back home to the Church, following their leader through the great *porta fidei*, the “door of faith.” So this Jubilee year, in front of thousands of pilgrims, Cardinal Della Genga made his way to the door. It was fifty-five years after the candlestick incident. Cardinal Della Genga who had become Pope Leo XII neared the door.

Turning to the Cardinal beside him – Cardinal Castiglioni, the Pope said “Let me have the hammer.” With a sly grin, Castiglioni replied, “Just like I gave you the candlestick?” Amazingly, four years later Castiglioni succeeded his friend and became Pope, taking the name Pius VIII. Now if you told any of those pew sitters back in 1770 that they had two future-Popes in the back of their church, they’d have laughed you out of the building: “Those two boys? The ones shoving and whacking each other with candles?” Today’s Gospel gives us the good news that God can change even weeds to wheat and that we should be patient.

9. This is Good News to us during this time. This means that we are guided to be patient and understanding in all our relationships with the hope that they will improve. In our marriages we are more likely to forgive and to have hope for change. With our children we know we can relax a little bit and expect to see growth and maturity if the right influences are present. The Lord has promised us the gift of the Holy Spirit to help us in every situation. Let us not give up on anybody or any situation. God is not finished with us yet.