

## 16<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, CYCLE A

*Wisdom 12: 13, 16-19 + Psalm 86 + Romans 8: 26-27+ Matthew 13: 24-43*

Holy Spirit Catholic Church: July 23, 2017

Growing up in the Jacobi family, as children of Andrew and Mary Jacobi, we 4 kids (my two younger brothers, my younger sister, and I) were expected to do a number of chores inside our home and on our 6-acre plot of land. One outdoor chore was to mow the acre-size lawn with a push mower. This took about 5 hours, so dad, to give us a little incentive to commit the time needed to complete this task, would actually pay us to do so---10 cents an hour. Another major chore was weeding the ½ acre garden, in which grew corn, potatoes, beans, watermelon, squash and a variety of other vegetables.

For this work there was no pay, so we kids would try to get it done as quickly as possible. But in our desire to finish the task quickly, sometimes we would pull up the good stuff along with the weeds.

I still remember my dad getting upset at my brother and I, asking us why we could not take the time to note the difference between a bean sprout and a weed, as he looked down the row of beans that we had destroyed by our “weeding.” In our haste, we pulled up the stuff that would have produced food, because in our hurry we thought it looked like a weed.

Thankfully, weeding is not part of the job description of the disciples of Jesus. In God’s mysterious plan, everything and everyone has an opportunity to grow until harvest time---no weeding out allowed until then. Then it is God, who as the landowner does the reaping, not we disciples. It is God who does the judging of who is wheat and ready for the harvest of eternal life and who is a weed to be cast into the everlasting fire.

In last Sunday’s “Parable of the Sower,” Jesus revealed why some people reject him and reject his followers.

The bottom line—these people are not receptive to the living word of God, who is Jesus. There are many different reasons why these people do not receive Jesus, some have hard, closed hearts; others wilt under persecution or in difficult times; while others are consumed by their pursuit of worldly riches.

What are we to do with these people?

How are we to live with them, especially those who seem to oppose Jesus and oppose us?

We want to weed them out, to root them up, to condemn them now to the fires of hell. But Jesus' response in the Parable of the Weeds and the Wheat--- such weeding is not our job.

In fact, Jesus is comfortable letting his wheat grow because the weeds can do it no harm.

After all, what we think looks like a weed might very well be wheat.

The list of saints contains the names of many "weeds" who were transformed into wheat and produced an abundant harvest for the reign of God.

In fact, the Gospel author, Matthew, who gives us this very parable, which is unique to his Gospel,

was labeled a "weed" in his day because he was a hated tax collector.

Yet still too often we do the very thing Jesus tells us not do—deciding who is in God's good graces and ours, and who deserves to be outside, uprooted, cast out.

This "weeding" attitude is very prevalent in our polarized politics, which then spills over into other areas of our lives.

Instead of judging a person's action as good or bad,

we judge the person and condemn them, acting as judge and jury in order to label them a "WEED."

If they are of a different political party than we are---WEED.

If they are here in our country without proper immigration papers---WEED.

If they do not believe as we do in various areas of morality---WEED.

Those who label others as "weeds" are like children in living their faith, not mature at all in their relationship to Jesus.

These believers forget that weeding is the Master's job, not the job of the disciples.

If there are weeds to pull, let them be the attitudes and behaviors within us.

This is the only weeding that Jesus allows---in the garden of our own lives, not others.

We all have plenty of weeds to pull, and perhaps the first is this deadly weed of judgment of others—our quick and rapid-fire decisions about who is good and who is bad, who belongs here and who does not, who is alien and who is not.

This weed of judging and condemning others can grow into a noxious weed, one that brings death and destruction in its wake.

Judging in this way can lead to condemning certain groups of people to hell, and looking upon them as not even human, and thus treating them in horrific ways.

Look at our own country's history and the account of the Salem Witch Trials, or at our church history and the terrors of the Spanish Inquisition,

or at world history and the horrors of the Holocaust,  
to see what happens when human beings play God  
and decide who will live and who will die.

The Gospel today challenges us to reassess all of this with the reminder  
that we are called to plant, not to weed or to reap.

Our best hope is that planting and watering our mustard-seed size faith  
that we will grow in mercy and loving compassion  
so that we can provide shade and comfort for others in God's creation,  
who suffer from the blazing heat of judgment and condemnation.

If we are honest with ourselves, we would admit that our failures and our sins  
merit us being pulled up as weeds.

But the good news is that the landowner, the God who made heaven and earth,  
is willing to wait on us to get it right until the time of the harvest.

God's patience is directed toward our salvation.

God's justice is revealed in his kindness.

God's power is revealed in his clemency.

God's saving love is revealed in the cross planted in our midst,  
the Tree of Life in which we find shade and welcome.

In these parables in Chapter 13 of Matthew's Gospel,  
Jesus speaks about the "kingdom of heaven" being like a man sowing good seed  
in a field, or a mustard seed growing or yeast transforming dough.

One way to understand what Jesus means when he uses this phrase—  
"kingdom of heaven" --- is to translate it as "God's love."

So when we hear Jesus say "The Kingdom of Heaven is like," we substitute the words,  
"God's love is like...."

For God's love looks like the patience of the landowner who has the ability to wait  
on the miracle of weeds being transformed into wheat.

God's love is like a tiny mustard seed, something small and unnoticed,  
which takes root in the fertile soil of believers' lives to bring an abundance of growth.

God's love is like the yeast that can transform the dough of our lives  
so that we can be bread for a world hungering for God's saving mercy.