

## 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

For three Sundays this July we travel through the 13<sup>th</sup> chapter of Matthew's Gospel, which is full of parables.

This Parable Discourse of Jesus is the 3<sup>rd</sup> of 5 great discourses in Matthew's Gospel. We have already heard two discourses this year: The Sermon on the Mount in chapters 5-7 and the discourse on Missionary Discipleship in chapter 10.

In this 3<sup>rd</sup> great discourse Jesus uses parables to reveal what God is like.

He begins each parable with the phrase, "The Kingdom of Heaven is like", a phrase used over 50 times by Jesus in Matthew's Gospel.

With these words, Jesus signals he is going to reveal something about the nature of God.

In this 13<sup>th</sup> Chapter of Matthew, there are 7 parables.

Last Sunday we heard the first of the seven, "The Sower and the Seed," where God's generosity was on display in the sower who scatters seeds, no matter what the soil type.

This middle Sunday we are invited into the world of 3 parables:

the mustard seed, the yeast, and the wheat and the weeds.

By speaking in parables, Jesus, the divine Word of God, announces what has lain hidden since the foundation of the world, the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven.

The way things work in the kingdom of heaven, the way God works, is by starting small and then bringing about great growth.

God takes something tiny like a mustard seed and energizes it by His divine love, bringing about great growth.

A little bit of yeast leavens 50 liters of flour—

something so immense can be transformed by the power of something so small.

Today's 3<sup>rd</sup> parable of The Wheat and the Weeds is unique to Matthew's Gospel,

reminding us that God's patience is directed toward the salvation of human beings.

Jesus' followers are to imitate this divine patience in their dealings with one another, refraining from judging or condemning others.

There will be judgment, but it will be God doing the judgment at the end of the age, at the time of the final harvest.

In last Sunday's parable of "The Sower and the Seed,"

the obstacles to the reception of the divine word of God were of human making:

hard hearts, superficial reception, love of riches.

This week's parable it is the enemy of human nature and of God, the devil, who tries to prevent human beings from producing a harvest for the Kingdom of God.

The servants in the parable could very well represent the impatient disciples who want to rip out the ones they identify as "weeds," but the patience of the Master overrules their hasty judgment. The Master knows that the power of the wheat to grow and thrive is greater than the power of the weeds to choke out the wheat. In Jesus' day the weed growing in a wheat field, called "zizania", looks like wheat in its early stage of growth, so there is no way to tell them apart until harvest. Plus, if one goes into the field to pull out what looks like a weed before the time for harvest, its roots are intertwined with the roots of the wheat and would destroy it.

So, God's patience is directed toward salvation, allowing the time to pass for the seed to grow and then blade to push out of the earth and then the ear of wheat and finally the ripening of the grain. All this takes time, and God waits patiently to see what will develop. We see how God's ways are not our American ways, because we are a very impatient people, wanting results right now.

By this parable, Jesus acknowledges the presence of evil in the world—there are weeds. But he challenges his disciples to not rush to judgment on who is a "weed," because only God can judge that reality. Just as there are different types of soil in the human heart---our hearts are not 100% good soil always receptive to the living word of God---so there is a mixture of goodness and evil residing in the depths of each heart. We have to humbly admit this truth, so we do not condemn ourselves by exacting vengeance on those we consider to be weeds.

With God, nothing is impossible.  
God's loving mercy and transforming grace can change weeds to wheat.  
For since God became human in Jesus, all things are possible,  
even a weed being transformed into life-giving wheat.

The Son of God even became a weed, as St. Paul states:  
"he became sin (weed) so that we might become God's righteousness (wheat)."  
The Son of God was judged and condemned to death by the self-righteous.  
They thought they were the good guys killing the bad guy.

Among Jesus' chosen followers were quite a few who were changed from weed to wheat. This transformation took place in the tax collector who wrote today's Gospel. This amazing miracle of mercy also happened in the apostle who composed today's 2<sup>nd</sup> reading and who wrote most of the New Testament, even though he originally persecuted and imprisoned the early Christians.

By the mercy of God, all things are possible. Hearts can change. Those who look like weeds turn out to be wheat producing an abundant harvest. Recently I heard of a prisoner feared by other prisoners and guards alike, who spent several years in solitary confinement. However, while in prison he had a life-changing encounter with the Living Lord and his merciful love. Now he is living as a free man, advancing the mission of the Kingdom of Heaven.

The Catholic Church teaches and holds dear the dignity of all human life, from the life conceived in the womb to a natural death. The Church speaks out on behalf of the dignity of every human life, even the life of the prisoner on death row. In our name, the federal government executed three prisoners this past week, man taking the place of God, deciding who deserved to live and who deserved to die.

Think what would have happened if Paul had been condemned to death because of his participation in the murder of St. Stephen---we probably would not be blessed with the Christian Faith because Paul is the one who took the Good News to the Gentiles.

Our mission as disciples of Jesus Christ is not to judge and condemn, not to destroy the ones we consider to be weeds in this world. Our job is to continue the proclamation of repentance begun by the Son God---  
"Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is close at hand."

At the end of Matthew's Gospel, when Jesus commissioned the 11 apostles to continue his work, he said nothing at all about judging others, but rather gave this command:  
"Go and make disciples...."

Fr. Joseph Jacobi