



## Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time July 17, 2011 A

### ON WHEAT AND WEEDS AND SUMMER READINGS

Today's Gospel has three parables. The first is the *Parable of the Weeds and Wheat*, directed to the Pharisees and Scribes who are seemingly critical of Jesus' association with sinners. The religious leaders of the day separate themselves from the tax collectors and sinners whom they regard as unclean and not worthy of God's saving love. They believe sinners should be weeded out. But Jesus, in his ministry, intentionally seeks out sinners so that he can show them God's love. In this parable, Jesus repudiates elitism and underscores the fact that the human community is a "mixed bag" of wheat and weeds, of good and bad. He proclaims that judgment is God's business and that it will only be finally rendered at harvest time, i.e., on the Last Day. Until then, there is ample opportunity for change and growth. For Jesus' self-righteous contemporaries, the parable warns against judging, labeling, and excluding others because they do not seem to measure up.

Writing many years later, Matthew uses the parable to address those leaders in his community who try to exclude some people because they are sinners (weeds). Like Jesus, Matthew reminds his Church community (and us) that every community, and each of us individually, is a "mixed bag" of sin and virtue. The role of Church leaders is not to play God by heavy-handed judgments, but to preach repentance and practice mercy, patience, and compassion. The separation of the wheat and weeds must be left to God. In Corinthians 4:5, Paul reminds us that there must be no "passing of premature judgment." Paul is aware that we could get it terribly wrong about Jesus and his followers. Paul himself was "weed" for a long time before becoming "wheat." But even after his transformation, many continued to regard him as "weed."

The following saying in a way summarizes the message of the parable of the wheat and weeds: "There is so much bad (weeds) in the best of us and so much good (wheat) in the worst of us, that it ill behooves any of us to judge the rest of us."

The two other parables from this Gospel tell us that small beginnings gradually and eventually lead to a big end and that God is at work even though we may not notice it. God is the yeast making growth happen slowly, gently, and almost imperceptibly.

#### ***Another Reflection***

Perhaps the reason Jesus tells the parable of the weeds and wheat is because he is also worried about weeding too soon. That is, people can have the tendency to rush to judgment about the worth of others. There are countless people—late bloomers—who would not have made the grade in their profession or field if the decision to eliminate them had come too soon. Michael Jordan, for one, was cut out from his high school basketball team. St. Thomas Aquinas was thought to have been too slow witted to be a scholar. And Blessed Solanus Casey, whose fame as a spiritual guide became known worldwide, almost didn't make it through his first months of seminary. In the spiritual realm especially, it may be difficult to determine which are the weeds and which are the wheat.

#### **Books by John & Stasi Elredge**

A few years ago, I recommended as a Christmas gift for men the book *Wild at Heart: Discovering the Secret of a Man's Soul* by John Elredge. I think I sold 200 copies of the book.

Elredge has teamed up with his wife Stasi in writing another book entitled *Captivating—Unveiling the Mystery of a Woman's Soul*. It talks, among other things, about: *The Heart of a Woman; What Eve Can Tell; Wounded; Healing the Wound; Romanced; Beauty to Unveil; Mothers, Daughters, Sisters; Warrior Princesses.*

#### **The Journey of Desire: Searching for the Life We've Only Dreamed of**

This book, like other books by Elredge, has a Journal and Guidebook to help us to personalize the message. Here are a few excerpts from the book and the journal that accompanies it:

Once upon a time there lived a sea lion who had lost the sea. He lived in a country known as the barren lands. High on a plateau, far from any coast, it was a place so dry and dusty that it could only be called a desert. A kind of coarse grass grew in patches here and there and a few trees were scattered across the horizon. But mostly, it was dust. And sometimes wind, which together make one very thirsty. Of course, it must seem strange to you that such a beautiful creature should wind up in a desert at all. He was, mind you, a sea lion. But things like this do happen.

How the sea lion came to the barren lands, no one could remember. It all seemed so very long ago. So long, in fact, it appeared as though he had always been there. Not that he belonged in such an arid place. How could that be? He was, after all, a sea lion. But as you know, once you have lived so long in a certain spot, no matter how odd, you come to think of it as home.

In another piece, Elredge writes:

*The clues as to who we really are and why we are here comes to us through our heart's desire. But it comes in surprising ways, and so often goes unnoticed, or misunderstood. Once in a while life comes together for us in a way that feels so good and right and what we've been waiting for. These are the moments in our lives that we wish could go on forever. They aren't necessarily the "Kodak moments," weddings and births and great achievements. More often than not, they come in subtler, unexpected ways, as if to sneak up on us.*

*Think of times in your life that made you wish for all the world that you had the power to make time stand still. Are they not moments of love, moments of joy? Simple moments of rest and quiet when all seems to be well. Something in your heart says, Finally—it has come. This is what I was made for!*

### **A Final Piece**

There is a secret set within each of our hearts. It often goes unnoticed, we rarely can put words to it, and yet it guides us throughout the days of our lives. This secret remains hidden for the most part in our deepest selves. It is simply the desire for life as it was meant to be. It is elusive, to be sure. It seems to come and go at will. And though it seems to taunt us, and may at times cause us great pain, we know when it returns that it is priceless. For if we could recover this desire, unearth it from beneath all other distractions, and embrace it as our deepest treasure, we would discover the secret of our existence.

Your existence has a deep meaning. Yet for most of us, it remains hidden, shrouded and buried beneath all the other pressures and demands and busyness of life. But it

doesn't go away. Your life has a secret, something written deep in your heart. Have you ever stopped to wonder: *What is the point of my life? Who am I, really? Why am I even here—why did God create me?* How would you respond to these questions now? What is the secret of your life?

### **Prayers**

Here are two excellent one-liner prayers that you might want to pray often:

- *Holy Spirit, help me to discover and become the person you created me to be.*
- *Holy Spirit, help me to recognize the moments and experiences in life that speak to me about the deepest desires of my heart.*

As we search for the true self that God created us to be, we could also say the following prayer:

*“Give me a candle of your Spirit, O God,  
as I go down into the deep of my own being.  
Show me the hidden things.  
Take me down to the spring of my life,  
and tell me my nature and my name.  
Give me freedom to grow,  
so that I may become my true self,  
the fulfillment of the seed You planted in me  
at my making.  
Out of the deep I cry unto thee, O God. Amen.*  
George Appleton

### **Waking the Dead—The Glory of the Heart Fully Alive**

In John 10:10, Jesus says to us: *"I have come to give you life, life in its full abundance."*

In the early centuries of Christianity, St. Irenaeus wrote: *"The glory of God is man fully alive."*

In this book, John Elredge shows us how God restores our hearts, our humanity, and sets us free to live the life God created us to live. "There are four streams," Elredge says, "through which we can discover the abundant life: Walking with God; Receiving His Intimate Counsel; Deep Restoration; and Spiritual Warfare.

**I will be away on vacation the next two weeks  
visiting Connecticut and Massachusetts.  
I will return Aug. 1st.**

Have a blessed and prayerful week,

