



Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time A July 19, 2020

- ◆ **Parable of the wheat and weeds:
Leaving it to God to judge who is
good and who isn't**
- ◆ **An example of flawed goodness**
- ◆ **Three witnesses to goodness**
- ◆ **A prayer for a granddaughter**

In today's Gospel, we hear the story of another farmer who goes to sow good seed in his field. But at nighttime an enemy comes and sows bad seeds. The farmer orders his servants to pluck up the bad seeds or weeds, saying: "Don't let us wait until harvest time to do the sorting out."

Commentators tell us that this parable was directed at the Pharisees and all those (perhaps early Church leaders) who needed to separate the law abiders from the law breakers.

Jesus tells his audience that they are not to get into the business of judging who is good and who is bad. God, and God alone, can see into the hearts of people and judge who is and isn't good. Ironically enough, Jesus is considered a "weed" by many of the religious leaders of his day and, in time, they do, in fact, pluck him out because they judge him to be a bad weed in their midst.

In 1Cor 4:5, Paul says that there must be no passing of premature judgment. Leave that until the Lord comes. Paul knows quite well that we can get it terribly wrong about people. After all, he himself gets it terribly wrong about Jesus and his followers for many years. He is very convinced that they are weeds that need to be plucked up. During those years, we can say that Paul (then Saul) is a *weed* in God's eyes. But when God touches his life, he repents and becomes *wheat*. After Paul's conversion, his enemies regard him as weed.

A parable with a stern warning

The parable of the wheat and weeds has two warnings:
(1) Those of us who are weeds had better change our

ways before the day of judgment or else we will find ourselves severely judged by God; (2) We should all refrain from judging who is *weed* and who is *wheat*. As the saying goes: "There is so much bad in the best of us, and so much good in the worst of us, that it ill behooves any of us to judge the rest of us." In other words, patches of weeds can be found in the best of gardens. Each of us should occupy ourselves by plucking the weeds out of our own garden that we would have no time to be concerned with the weeds in our neighbor's garden. Such message should be received as a "restraining order" on any of us who tend to be busy judging others.

In the world of American politics, Republicans tend to look upon Democrats as weeds—and vice versa. The truth, of course, is that in the context of Jesus' Gospel, the policies promoted by these political parties are either in harmony with or in conflict with Gospel values. In other words, *both* parties have their *wheat* and *weeds*.

We can apply today's parable to our own spiritual lives. All of us wish we only had flowers (virtues) growing in our garden. But the reality is that, we, like the world of politics and the Church, have weeds (i.e., sin, weakness and darkness) in our soul. The Lord exercises great patience with us hoping that we will get rid of our weeds before he comes to take us. In the meantime, we must learn to live with both wheat and weeds.

Fr. Tom Green, S.J., in his book *Wheat Among the Weeds*, says that sometimes, God, in his mysterious ways, can use our weeds (vices) just as much, if not more, as our wheat (virtues) to draw us closer to him. I'm sure that many an alcoholic would testify to the truth of this statement. Recall St. Paul's famous "thorn in the flesh." Three times he asks the Lord to remove his "weed," but three times the Lord refuses. It must have been frustrating for the perfectionist Paul to learn to live with his particular weed. But along the way, he obviously sees the wisdom of God's way. In actual fact, he comes to a point where he rejoices in his weaknesses because it is the place where he, *most* of all, experiences God's grace and touch (2Cor 12). Amazing!

God in his amazing way uses our sin and weaknesses to draw us to himself. What a consoling thought. Nevertheless, in no way is this meant to justify an attitude of softness toward patterns of sin in our lives. It is comforting to know that God, in his infinite and mysterious way, can use our sins to draw us to himself and can use us to touch others despite our sins and weaknesses.

Two other parables

The other two parables in today's Gospel form a couplet in that both parables carry the same message. The contrast is between the small and promising beginnings of the Kingdom and its full, triumphant expansion. The tiny mustard seed gradually sprouts into a tree. The small amount of yeast makes the entire loaf rise. Jesus is an itinerant preacher and many scoffed at his efforts. In response, Jesus says: "Look at the mustard seed and the leaven. Just wait and be patient and you'll notice the growth of the Kingdom." Growth in ourselves and in our children is often like the mustard seed. It is slow and hardly noticeable, but it is happening. Small beginnings can produce results far beyond what is apparent. God is the yeast making growth happen slowly, gently and sometimes imperceptibly.

Flawed goodness - Oscar Schindler

Reflecting on today's Gospel, Fr. Flor McCarthy writes:

We have a tendency to divide people into two categories: saints and sinners. However, this division is quite unreal. People are not so easily categorized. Human beings are complex, and we find things that are at odds with one another coexisting in the same human being.

Many people were inspired by the story of Oskar Schindler, the German industrialist, who saved over a thousand Polish Jews from the concentration camps. One of the people he saved said of him, "He was our father, our mother, our only hope. He never let us down." Yet many who saw the film Schindler's List were surprised, if not quite put off, by his vices. He was a man endowed with all the human vices. Hence, he constitutes something of a moral puzzle.

Schindler certainly was no saint. In fact, he was riddled with contradictions. Unfaithful to his wife, he certainly knew how to enjoy the so-called good life—cigars, drink, women. ...He was a Catholic, but in name

only. He was also a member of the Nazi party, and his avowed aim was to end the war with "two trunks full of money." He exploited the Jews as a source of cheap labour.

But there was another and better side to him, and in spite of his lapses, he always returned to that better side. There was basic goodness about him. As the war went on he became appalled at the horrors of 'the final solution.' At considerable personal risk (he was twice arrested by the Nazis), he protected his workers from the death camps, thereby showing that he was undoubtedly a courageous man.

But Schindler was no angel. He was a mere human being, an essentially good human being, even though his goodness was seriously flawed. We wonder what he might have achieved had he not been so divided. And the Nazis, for all the horrific things they did, weren't totally evil either. They were not devils incarnate. They too were human beings, though bad human beings.

Some people don't seem to have any understanding of the divided nature of each human being—of the coexistence in every person of good and evil, strength and weakness, loyalty and betrayal.... As soon as they discover a weakness in someone, they write the person off. Their hero must be perfect. As soon as a flaw or a crack appears, they lose faith in him.

But things are not that simple. Human beings are complex—and that includes each of us. We are an extraordinary mixture of good and bad. Moreover, the roots of good are so entwined with the roots of evil that one can't be pulled up without pulling up the other.

We must learn to be patient and lenient, towards ourselves in the first place. We must be hospitable towards all that we are. We must acknowledge the dark side of ourselves, without conceding victory to it. We must struggle on in spite of the weeds, confident that with God's help, the good will finally triumph. It is through struggle that we grow, provided we don't throw the towel in.

And we must then be lenient towards others. Even though we see only part of a person's life, we tend to rush to judgement. We are too quick to classify people, and once we have classified them as evil, for them there is no redemption. Only God has the right and the knowledge to judge, yet God is patient and tolerant.

By concentrating on people's vices, we become blind to their virtues. We are too eager to voice our criticisms, but reluctant to give a single word of encouragement, and in this way we bar every road to improvement. Therefore, let us not knock others. Let us seek the good in everyone, reveal it, bring it out.

A person will be judged, not by a single act or stage in his life, but by his whole life. That is why judgement can't come until the end. A man may make a great mistake, but by the grace of God redeem himself.

"Attempts to hide the streakiness of our holy people, though sometimes successful, are always dishonest" (Anthony de Mello).

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THREE CHRISTIAN WITNESSES

Pope Leo XIII - Pope (1810-1903)

On February 20, 1878, Vincenzo Pecci, the 68-year-old archbishop of Perugia, was elected to succeed the long-reigning Pope Pius IX. Pius had done more than any other pope in modern times to enhance the image and power of the papacy. But having defined the mission of the Church largely in terms of negative opposition to the modern age, he left little opening for constructive engagement with issues of the day. The new pope, who took the name Leo XIII, was keen to overcome this defensive posture.

Without doubt, Leo's most significant contribution was in his pronouncements in the social realm. With his encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1891), he inaugurated the modern era of Catholic social teaching. Leo was the first pope to address the problems associated with the rise of industrial capitalism and to declare the sympathies of the Church with the working class.

While rejecting socialism, Leo's encyclical implied a strong critique of unbridled capitalism. Most of all, it declared the Church's vital interest in the social and material, as well as spiritual, welfare of human beings. It articulated a commitment to principles of social justice, the dignity of labor, and defense of the poor—a commitment that would undergo further elaboration in the subsequent century of Catholic social teaching.

Pope Leo died on July 20, 1903, at the age of 93.

"I want to see the church so far forward that my successor will not be able to turn back."

-Pope Leo XIII

[Robert Ellsberg, *Blessed Among Us: Day By Day with Sainly Witnesses, a Give Us This Day* book (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2016), page 415. Used with permission.]

Lawrence Jenco - Priest (1934-1996)

In 1985, Fr. Lawrence Jenco, a Servite priest from Illinois and the director of Catholic Relief Services in Lebanon, was taken hostage in Beirut by a Shiite group called Islamic Holy War. He would spend 564 days in captivity before his release and return to the United States.

Days of unrelenting boredom—often blindfolded, locked in a closet, or handcuffed to a radiator—were interspersed with bursts of terror. During transport from one hiding place to another, he was bound in tape from head to toe or wrapped with explosives. He endured beatings and several times expected execution.

Nevertheless, he sustained himself with prayer, reciting a homemade rosary, or celebrating a clandestine Mass—sometimes in the company of fellow American hostages. The night before he was released, one of the guards asked him if he could forgive his captors. Jenco realized his faith was being put to the test. While he would not forget his treatment, he chose the way of forgiveness in place of vindictiveness.

After his release, Jenco remained remarkably free of bitterness, sharing a message of peace and reconciliation. (He was more disturbed to learn that his freedom had been purchased by the sale of arms to Iran.) He served as a campus minister at the University of Southern California and died of cancer on July 19, 1996.

"God, give me a new heart and a new spirit. You have asked me to love unconditionally. May I forgive as you have asked me to forgive, unconditionally. Then you will be my God and I will be your son."

-A prayer by Fr. Lawrence Jenco,
composed the night of his release

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**Albert Luthuli - Zulu Chief, Nobel Laureate
(1898-1967)**

Albert Luthuli, a member of the Zulu tribe, was raised in a Christian mission reserve in Natal, South Africa. Eventually, he was elected chief in the village of Grootville, an office that enabled him to promote the rights of his poor and oppressed people. To the white-minority government, chiefs were regarded as useful intermediaries in their management and control of the black masses. Luthuli, however, had come to believe the interests of his people could best be served by the overthrow of apartheid. After he joined the African National Congress, the government “dismissed” him as chief. This only freed him for a more active role in the anti-apartheid struggle, and he became the national leader of the ANC.

As a result of his activities, he was repeatedly arrested, “banned,” and confined to house arrest. In 1955 he was arrested, along with the ANC leadership, and charged with high treason. He was eventually freed and helped bring the case against apartheid to the world. In 1960 he was awarded the Nobel Peace prize.

Throughout his life, Luthuli held to a deep Christian faith. He disagreed with those activists who dismissed Christianity as the religion of the oppressor. But he challenged the Church to “be *with* the people *in* their lives.” Speaking for himself, he said, “I am in Congress precisely *because* I am a Christian.”

Albert Luthuli died on *July 21, 1967*.

“It is inevitable that in working for Freedom, some individuals and some families must take the lead and suffer: The Road to Freedom is via the CROSS.”

-Albert Luthuli

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A Prayer for My Granddaughter

Aideen Madden shares a prayer for her grandchild. (The feast of Joachim and Anne, the parents of Mary, is celebrated on *July 25*.)

Hannah, you are as yet too young to read and understand my prayer for you. That day may sometime in the future come when your mother, taking from some box of souvenirs which she may own, my prayer – may hand it as my gift to you.

I send you no beautiful card, Hannah, but the message of a grandmother’s love and care and prayers for you; I send you words of thanks for your trusting smiles; I thank you for your Easter visit so full of joy.

I have hopes and wishes for you, Hannah. May you grow up to be a kind, generous and loving person;

(I sense already that your presence is making the world a better place.) May you be ambitious for the higher gifts for those that lie within;

May you dance and sing often, dear granddaughter; May you enjoy swimming and tennis; May you read good literature;

May you see beautiful scenery, art galleries, great cities; May you have a happy home and remain close to it in spirit wherever you go.

May you be a true friend, granddaughter; May you be blessed with loyal life-long friends;

May you endure suffering with dignity and courage; May you remember me with love.

I love you, Hannah Grace – May God go with you on life’s journey; May his mother wrap her mantle around you.

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Have a blessed week,

