



Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time July 23 2017 A

- ◆ **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**

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 got it terribly wrong about Jesus and his followers for many years. He was very convinced that they were weeds that needed to be plucked up. During those years, we can say that Paul (then Saul) was 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 for 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 ways 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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New Sunday & Holy Day Liturgies by Fr. Flor McCarthy.]

Three American Christian witnesses

For the past few weeks, I have been sharing with you star witnesses of Gospel values narrated in the book *Blessed Among Us* by Robert Ellsberg. Here are three more witnesses whose feasts occur at this time of the year.

William Wilberforce, July 28 (1759-1833)

Abolitionist

William Wilberforce, an Evangelical Christian and member of the British Parliament, devoted his career single-mindedly to the abolition of slavery.

Wilberforce was convinced there was no greater moral blight on the English conscience than the slave trade. Though slave labor was not permitted in England, the trafficking of African slaves and the exploitation of their labor was a mainstay of the imperial economy, particularly in the Caribbean and the southern United States. Wilberforce would not rest until his country should recognize the hideous cruelty represented by this system.

Tirelessly, he delivered speeches, circulated petitions, and introduced bills in Parliament. Despite complaints that his cause was quixotic, or a betrayal of his class interests, he would not relent. Constantly, he pressed the point that what was being justified in the name of profit was the brutal commerce in human life.

Finally, in 1806, after 20 years of effort, he won the argument. A bill in Parliament outlawed slave trading in the British colonies. Still he struggled for another 25 years to win the complete emancipation of all slaves in the empire. Such a bill was passed in 1833, weeks before his death on July 29. 700,000 slaves were immediately liberated.

"Never, never will we desist till we have wiped away this scandal from the load of guilt under which we at present labor, and until we have extinguished every trace of this bloody traffic which our posterity will scarcely believe had been suffered to exist so long, a disgrace and dishonor to our country."

-William Wilberforce

Servant of God Stanley Rother, July 28 (1935-1981) Priest and Martyr

Stanley Rother, a priest from Oklahoma, volunteered in 1968 to serve in his diocese's mission to Santiago Atitlán, a picturesque Indian town in Guatemala. After mastering the Mayan dialect of the Tzutuhil Indians, Rother won their trust and respect for his complete dedication to the needs of the community. Aside from the overwhelming demands of his pastoral work, Rother could often be found wielding a hoe in a farmer's cornfield or performing any number of unseen acts of friendship. For his part, Rother felt so inspired by the faith of the Tzutuhil people that he could not imagine a life apart from them.

By the 1980's, simmering resentment against social injustice erupted in open resistance, provoking in turn a massive wave of government repression. The violence drew ever closer to Santiago Atitlán. In January 1981, after his name appeared on a death list, Rother agreed to leave the country and return to Oklahoma. But he could not stand to be so far from his flock. By Holy Week, he had returned. On July 28, masked men slipped into the parish rectory and tried to kidnap him. When he put up a fight, they killed him on the spot.

After the funeral Mass, Rother's body was returned to Oklahoma for burial. But his family agreed to the request of his parish and allowed his heart to be interred in the Church of Santiago Atitlán. In 2015, the Holy See officially named him a martyr, opening the way to his beatification.

"Pray for us that we may be a sign of the love of Christ for our people."

-Servant of God Stanley Rother

Bl. Zdenka Cecilia Schelingova, July 30 (1916-1955)

Martyr

Cecilia Schelingova was born in northern Slovakia. As a young girl, she came in contact with the Sisters of Charity of the Holy Cross, a nursing order, and was inspired to join them. At fifteen, accompanied by her mother, she presented herself at the motherhouse of the congregation and asked to be admitted. After training as a nurse, with a specialty in radiology, she took her vows and became Sr. Zdenka.

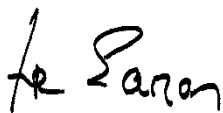
In 1942, she was sent to a hospital in Bratislava. There she lived through the war and the subsequent Russian occupation. The postwar Communist regime imposed repressive measures against the Church. Many priests were arrested. Some of them, sick or recovering from torture, were sent to Zdenka's hospital. In 1952, learning that one of these prisoners was to be transferred to Siberia, she prayed for guidance: "Jesus, I offer my life for his. Save him." After putting sleeping pills in the guard's tea, she helped the priest escape. She later tried to repeat this ploy, but this time she was arrested. Subjected to torture and tried as an "enemy of the people's democracy," she was sentenced to twelve years in prison.

Her suffering in prison—from cold, hunger, and untreated illness—was terrible. Finally, the state, not wanting to create a martyr, released her in April 1955. But her congregation, fearful of being associated with a convicted traitor, would not take her back. She died on July 31, 1955, and was beatified a martyr in 2003.

"I want to do God's will without paying attention to myself, my comfort or my rest."

-Blessed Zdenka Cecilia Sc

Have a blessed week,



HUGS

*It's wondrous what a hug can do.
A hug can cheer you when you're blue.
A hug can say "I love you so" or
"Gee, I hate to see you go."
A hug is "Welcome back again!" or
"Great to see you! Where've you been?"
A hug can soothe a small child's pain
and bring a rainbow after rain.
The hug. There's just no doubt about it.
We scarcely could survive without it.
A hug delights and warms and charms.
It must be why God gave us arms.
Hugs are great for fathers and mothers.
Sweet for sisters, well for brothers . . .
And chances are your favorite aunts
love them more than potted plants.
Kittens crave them, puppies love them.
Heads of State are not above them.
A hug can break the language barrier,
and make your travels so much merrier.
No need to fret about your store of 'em.
The more you give, the more there's
more of 'em.
So stretch out those arms without delay,
and give someone a hug today.*

- Author Unknown