

7th Sunday after Pentecost - Year A 2020

(Genesis 28:10-19; Romans 8:12-25; Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43)

Last Sunday and today, in the readings from the gospel, Jesus has been describing in parables what the kingdom of God is like. Last week, Fr Brent spoke about the Word of God falling on good and bad soil. The whole of chapter 13 in St Mathew's account of the gospel is about parables. In this chapter, you will find the parables of the mustard seed; yeast; hidden treasure; pearl and the fishing net, all these parables pertaining to the kingdom of God.

In this morning's reading, Jesus describes the kingdom of God, as wheat planted in a field. The wheat is in the ground and growing, but it hasn't reached maturity yet. It has not realised its full potential. The kingdom of God in this world, is one in which there is both good and evil, wheat and weeds growing together.

The Pharisees believed that the kingdom of God was only for saints and not sinners. Jesus did not agree with that, as the gospel story points out. We are well aware that in this world today, as well as in the church, there is a mixture of sinners and saints and all are in need of repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation. As Christians and the church of God, we need to reject the sin, but welcome and love the sinner, for we are a church that is inclusive and not exclusive.

This is how Jesus answered the early church's dilemma of having sinners among them when He said, *"Let the wheat and weeds grow together until the harvest"*. It is not for us to do the weeding that is the concern of the Harvester.

In fact Jesus did **not** only **not** exclude the sinners, but directed His ministry towards them. He sought them out, calling them to a new way of life. Earlier in St Matthew's account of the gospel, Jesus states, *"For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners"* (9:13).

There is a hard fact of life that we need to realise and understand, that the fine line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of all human beings. There is the potential for good and evil in each one of us, like the field of weeds and wheat that grow side by side. All of us are a mixture of weeds and wheat. None of us is perfect.

It is through the wisdom and grace of God, that we are given free choices to make, either the right or wrong decisions in our lives, to choose between God's will and our will. But as complex as our human nature may be, Jesus understands us, for He created us in His own image with the potential to grow into His likeness. I think of the weeds in the gospel story as obstacles that we choose, either consciously or sub-consciously, obstacles that create a barrier between God and ourselves, a barrier to God's grace in our lives. These obstacles are often selfish desires and temptations of the world and the flesh that hinder our relationship with God. However, Jesus has the desire and power to forgive and transform us, and change our lives through the Holy Spirit who dwells within us.

The three readings this morning, as well as the psalm (139) reminds us about living in a right relationship with God. In the reading from Genesis, we learn that although God had made a covenant with Abraham, Isaac and now Jacob, Jacob still had to establish his own relationship with God, like we all need to do. God came to Jacob in a dream and opened up heaven to Jacob, just as God has opened up heaven to all believers through His Son, Jesus.

St Paul, in his letter to the Romans, reminds us about the choices we have in either living according to the sinful nature or to live according to the Spirit of God, the Spirit that abides within each one of us, drawing us into a deep and personal relationship with God, a relationship that is so close that we can call Him by a very intimate name, Abba, Father. The words from one of my favourites psalm 139 this morning impresses upon us the unity that God has and the closeness of the relationship he desires to share with us and the fact that God knows us better than we know ourselves. *"O Lord you have searched me out and known me.....You knew my*

soul and my bones were not hidden from you: when I was formed in secret and woven in the depths of the earth” (1&14).

In his letter to the Romans, St Paul is assuring us of this journey towards God, that we are growing and maturing in the awareness of the Spirit of God, *“We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies” (22-23).*

Jesus understood so well these choices we have throughout our lives, Even in His small community of disciples, the weeds were present and persisted, yet He did not give up on them.

In all these instances, we see that God saw the weeds in their lives, but He also saw the wheat. We observe God transforming people, empowering them to reach the potential that God had created in them, and the potential that only He could see within each one of us.

God has tolerance and patience; He gives us time to change. Jesus was not in a hurry to pull out the weeds in the story. So too, we need to be tolerant and patient with God and especially with ourselves - (don't judge yourselves too harshly, because that often builds burdens of guilt). The world is a mixture of light and darkness, good and evil. We need to be mature enough to acknowledge the dark side of ourselves, especially when we succumb to temptation, without conceding victory to it. We need to struggle on, believing that God is on our side and that good will finally triumph. We should not despair at this darkness, but accept it and try to light a candle in the darkness. For when Christians light a candle, it reminds us of the presence and love of Christ in our lives.

The all-wise God knows that we need to go through some degree of suffering in our lives, not simply for sufferings sake, but so that we can come to know our need of redemption. Jesus calls each one of us to follow Him and this call is the way of the cross, a process that involves challenges and perhaps hardships along the way. God did not rescue Jesus from the horrors of the cross, but raised Him from the dead. Believing in God does not mean that we will never suffer illness, pain or tragedy. God does not always protect us from the pains of life, but enters into and shares in our hardships and ultimately redeems them. God gives us freedom of choice and respects that freedom, and will not interrupt that freedom, even when it might seem best to do.

So I encourage you to remain faithful to your times of daily prayer as we strive to grow in our relationship with God. Prayer can take many forms and is simply talking to God just as we talk to one another. St Therese of Lisieux said this about prayer, *“For me, prayer is a surge of the heart; it is a simple look turned toward heaven, it is a cry of recognition and of love, embracing both trial and joy.”*

I wish you all a blessed week. Stay safe and take care.

God bless

Fr John