

Fr James' homily for the Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: Wisdom 12:13-19
Second Reading: Romans 8:26-27
Gospel: Matthew 13:24-43



Let them both grow till the harvest.... Be wise in your weeding

Moving on from the Parable of the Sower last Sunday, today the lectionary too moves on and Jesus uses another image of the sowing of seeds, their growth and the harvest to come. Jesus talks to us plainly about the enemy, the devil, who has an agenda to mess up your wheat field, that is your soul, just as he has an agenda to mess up the whole of God's creation. Never dismiss the reality of evil, the active and personal force of evil. Pope Francis frequently reminds us that to do so is not wise! It is wise, rather, to be realistic about the influence of evil upon us and it is most wise to learn from the words of the Lord God how to cultivate virtue and grow in the Spirit. (The very brief two verses from St Paul today express this wisdom perfectly - we should allow God to form our prayers and reform and transform all that is in our hearts.)

I've repeated that word wisdom several times because the context of Holy Scripture today is the power of God's wisdom and love. This is the very theme of the Book of Wisdom that is our first reading. Wisdom in Scripture is sometimes identified with God the Holy Spirit, sometimes with God the Son, the Lord Jesus. Frequently wisdom is called "she" - as the feminine principle, the nurturing and long-suffering compliment to the power and strength of God as Father.

The Book of Wisdom today tells us that God "cares for everything" - he is not remote or uninvolved. In one sense, as has been said, everything that happens is in some sense God's will, either because it is in accord with his will, or because he allows it for a while (like the darnel in the parable). God is not threatened by anything and so he is infinitely lenient and patient. It is wise to know that God does not hold grudges like we do, he is not calculating as we are. Life changes for us radically when we learn this wisdom and learn to live accordingly: to surrender all we are to God and change by the constant weeding process of active repentance.

Hang on a minute, though - if God is all powerful and cares for everything, how come the world looks as though the opposite is true and seems as though God is remote and uninvolved?? This is a big and complex question - and it is wise to recognise that and not seek to answer it in one sentence. The subject of the "problem of evil" is in a sense the theory of everything... For now just think of a couple of things. It has been very poignant, but inspiring, to see the lengths that healthcare workers have gone to in the weeks of the pandemic crisis to try to ensure that nobody died alone on the Covid

wards. This wretched suffering has brought out great powers of compassion. If this is our instinct, how much more is it Gods! In the worst of circumstances it is wise to see great possibility to be moulded and changed by him. Or contemplate the Cross of Jesus, truly the worst of circumstances and of loneliness (*and this is wise advice for any day - in the Catholic tradition indeed we put aside Friday especially for this purpose and call for a sign of penitential abstinence*). God's power and love, the power of forgiving love, are revealed in this weakness and apparent defeat.

“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing”. The words from the Cross are the image of the wheat and the darnel growing together come into stark reality. Rather than react with destructive revenge with the inevitable collateral damage as it is called, God's way - the way of ultimate power over the world - is to give space for repentance and the nurturing of virtue. When we are wise, we realise this and our lives reflect the same use of power, and the understanding that evil influences us in some way. But it is also wise to know that there is a harvest, and at that point there is no more leniency. Listen, all who have ears.

Amen.

Fr James and Fr Tom wish you a blessed Sunday. Keep safe and well, and never hesitate to pick up the telephone and be in touch. See you in church I hope! Keep in close contact with the website for news of how practical plans are developing.