

# HOMILY ~ 16th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

## JULY 22/23, 2023

Do you know how to tell the weeds from the flowers in your garden? Pull out everything, and what grows back are the weeds. Of course, you are left with a mess, so that is probably not the best way to tell the difference. In the Gospel Reading, we hear the parable of the weeds and the wheat; and Jesus tells us a different way to handle the weeds and the wheat. There is a weed called Bearded Darnel. You cannot distinguish the Bearded Darnel seed from the wheat. When it first starts to grow, you cannot tell the weed from the wheat. By the time you can distinguish the difference, the plants are so intertwined that if you pull out the weeds, you will also pull out the wheat. You need to let them grow together. However, you do need to separate them at harvest time because the Bearded Darnel is poisonous. Our first inclination is to pull out the weeds; but if we do that, we will be left without a harvest.

This is a parable, so Jesus is not really talking about gardening. He is using a simple story to illustrate a spiritual lesson. We have the weeds and the wheat growing together in our individual lives. We have the weeds, the discouragements, the frustrations and the failures. We also have the wheat, the goodness, the fulfilling and the nurturing. We would like to pull out the weeds, deny them or not deal with them. We just want to keep the wheat. In reality, we have both; and they exist together. If we embrace them both, we can get through the difficult times by gaining strength from the good times. We have to embrace them both. That is what life is. There will always be some suffering in our lives, but there will also be joy and fulfillment.

We sometimes like to identify the weeds and the wheat regarding the people in our lives. We cannot judge people as acceptable or unacceptable, worthy or unworthy, good or bad. First of all, we are not totally acceptable ourselves. None of us are perfect. How many people would judge you as wheat, and how many would judge you as weeds? Quite honestly, sometimes I see myself as wheat and sometimes as weeds. Many times when we judge people, we judge them unfairly. We frequently do not know their motives or their circumstances. We do not know what we would have done in the same circumstances. When we judge others negatively, we distance ourselves from them. It is easy to stand on the sidelines and tell people

how wrong they are. It is much more difficult to hear their story, walk with them and try to help them. That is what Jesus is calling us to do. Sometimes with those who are close to us, we start to focus too much on the weeds and ignore the wheat. This is part of the challenge of maintaining long-term relationships. It is that negativity bias. We tend to focus on minor irritations. We start to forget why we loved them in the first place. We need to force ourselves to focus upon their goodness, and let go of the irritations. Our close relationships are precious, and we need to work to maintain them.

Jesus did not come into the world to condemn us; he came into the world to save us. Jesus is the God of second chances and third chances and fourth chances. He will never give up on us, and we should not give up on one another. Our job is to coexist with one another, to love and to be vehicles of God's grace. There will come a time when the weeds will be separated from the wheat, but that is not our job. That is God's job.

We are going through a time of change in our Church. I am not sure what the Church will look like in 20 years, but I know it will be different. Change is inevitable. When some people try to predict the future of the Church, they see the Catholic Church as a small group of people that accept all Church teaching without questioning them and follow all of the rules, kind of an exclusive club. That may be the future of the Church, but I do not think that is the Church that Jesus envisioned. That is the Church we would have had if the early disciples stayed in the upper room. They could have just stayed together in their own little group; but that is not what Jesus called them to do, and it is not what the early disciples did. They reached out to everyone. I think there are certain groups of people who do not feel welcome in the Church because of who they are. I think we need to do everything we can to break down those barriers so that everyone feels welcome. Jesus did not mean for the Church to be an exclusive club. He wants the Church to be all inclusive.

Love and Peace,

Fr. Jim