

“Brothers and sisters: The Spirit comes to the aid of our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought.” Words from our second reading today from the 8th chapter of St. Paul’s letter to the Romans – sisters and brothers, may the Lord give to you his peace and his joy.

Our 2nd reading today picks up from where the letter to the Romans left off last week, which reminded us that we indeed possess the Spirit of God as the first fruits of salvation, that we have the possibility of reaching out to God and experiencing something of heaven on earth, even now. But that reading also expressed how all of creation has been made subject to futility, and is groaning as it awaits for the fullness of redemption. This last statement brings out the difficulty of our present situation, for we are pulled, as it were, between what we already possess and what we hope for, between merely experiencing bits of heaven on earth and the desire to enter into that heavenly reality fully, completely, eternally. It is hard to be at peace amid such imperfection and tension, and we can quickly lose our patience. Since we’re not there yet, we must work and hope and pray and ask for that entrance one day into eternal life. It is at this point that the Spirit intervenes and helps us in our weakness, which is not necessarily a moral weakness, but arises rather from our limited sense of the spiritual, an inability to fathom the plans of God, and our lack of hope amidst the hardships we yet experience in the world. The Spirit therefore leads us through this tension, and teaches us how to pray and how to live as we ought.

Saint Pope John Paul II was once asked the question, “How does the Pope pray?” to which he answered, “You would have to ask the Holy Spirit! The Pope prays as the Holy Spirit permits him to pray.” Pope St. John Paul II used to pray in his chapel at the Vatican for a couple hours every day. And people who were close to him would say that his prayer, sounded like a literal groaning, not because the Pope had physical or spiritual suffering to contend with, although he certainly did, but that he was experiencing that prayer of the Spirit which St. Paul speaks about in Romans today, where the Spirit helps us pray in groans and sighs too deep for words. One a different occasion, there was a mother who heard her child attempting to have a conversation in his room, but his words were making little sense. You see, he was repeating the alphabet over and over again. “Why are you saying your ABC’s so many times,” she asked him. “I’m saying my prayers,” little Jimmy responded. “Your Prayers?” Mom inquired, “All I hear is the alphabet.” Patiently her son explained, “Well I don’t know all the words, so I give God the letters. He knows what I’m trying to say.” How deep was the prayer of the Spirit in and through St. John Paul II! How beautiful is the innocent prayer of a child who knew he could depend upon God! Yes, God comes to the aid of our weakness and teaches us to pray as we ought.

It's not easy to live and pray amidst the tension we experience in the world. More often than not, our prayers end up sounding like that of the disciples from the parable in the Gospel: "Lord, pull up these weeds! Better yet, permit us to be your instrument of justice - let us pull up these weeds. Such insidious and sinful things don't belong in the Kingdom of God. It is not right that the good should have to suffer because of the bad. We can't stand this tension, this unrest, this chaotic field, this messy harvest." And so in our prayer we selfishly come before God, asking him to solve all our problems. Whatever happened to thy will be done, which we pray every time we recite the Our Father? What about the good wheat that has been sowed in our lives, would we risk losing our goodness? What if some of these things happening around us and to us were blessings in disguise? And would our shortsighted judgments preclude the possibility of repentance, of reconciliation, of bringing good out of bad? And if we are honest with ourselves, what about the weeds that we have sown and our own need for mercy?

Jesus doesn't beat around the bush. He is a straight shooter in the Gospel. In life, we come across good people, and bad people, and people with a little bit of both good and bad - the world is one big mess of weeds and wheat and all sorts of plants living and growing together. Life is messy and full of tension. That is the reality. And yet, God knows that if he simply gives into our demands to step in now to impose justice, some of those who are basically good will be uprooted and cast out with them. God promises us that there will be a time for separation and judgment and all will be made well, but that time is not now. We have to trust that God knows what is best for us. In the meantime, of course, this means the righteous will have to live with the sinner and, even more challengingly, rise to the occasion of generosity and forgiveness to show them the same kind of concern we show to others.

Our model in this regard is Jesus, who became like us in all things. As a human being, he identified with the plight and the sufferings of his people and with the groaning of all of God's creation. Jesus himself innocently endured the wrongs of others right up to his death and asked forgiveness upon his persecutors. God shouldn't have had to lower himself. God shouldn't have been made to suffer. And yet he did. Jesus himself lived as wheat among weeds, and he calls us to follow him and do the same. While in our hurting and weakness and in our unresolved tension, we would like to demand love of others, the way of the Spirit calls us instead to respond to the demands of love which are placed on us. That is how we grow into the largest of plants and how we leaven the whole batch of dough. That is how we come to say "thy will be done." That is how we learn the prayer of the Spirit that goes beyond words. As Jesus offers himself as the bread of finest wheat at this harvest feast which is the Eucharist, let us be strengthened in this communion with him, so that led by the Spirit we may enter ever more deeply into the life of our good and gracious God.

Readings: <http://usccb.org/bible/readings/071920.cfm>

Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Lectionary: 106

Reading 1 [WIS 12:13, 16-19](#)

There is no god besides you who have the care of all,
that you need show you have not unjustly condemned.
For your might is the source of justice;
your mastery over all things makes you lenient to all.
For you show your might when the perfection of your power is disbelieved;
and in those who know you, you rebuke temerity.
But though you are master of might, you judge with clemency,
and with much lenience you govern us;
for power, whenever you will, attends you.
And you taught your people, by these deeds,
that those who are just must be kind;
and you gave your children good ground for hope
that you would permit repentance for their sins.

Responsorial Psalm [PS 86:5-6, 9-10, 15-16](#)

R. (5a) **Lord, you are good and forgiving.**

You, O LORD, are good and forgiving,
abounding in kindness to all who call upon you.
Hearken, O LORD, to my prayer
and attend to the sound of my pleading.

R. **Lord, you are good and forgiving.**

All the nations you have made shall come
and worship you, O LORD,
and glorify your name.

For you are great, and you do wondrous deeds;
you alone are God.

R. **Lord, you are good and forgiving.**

You, O LORD, are a God merciful and gracious,
slow to anger, abounding in kindness and fidelity.
Turn toward me, and have pity on me;
give your strength to your servant.

R. **Lord, you are good and forgiving.**

Reading 2 [ROM 8:26-27](#)

Brothers and sisters:

The Spirit comes to the aid of our weakness;
for we do not know how to pray as we ought,
but the Spirit himself intercedes with inexpressible groanings.
And the one who searches hearts
knows what is the intention of the Spirit,
because he intercedes for the holy ones
according to God's will.

Alleluia [CF. MT 11:25](#)

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Blessed are you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth;
you have revealed to little ones the mysteries of the kingdom.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel[MT 13:24-43](#) [OR 13:24-30](#)

Jesus proposed another parable to the crowds, saying:

“The kingdom of heaven may be likened
to a man who sowed good seed in his field.
While everyone was asleep his enemy came
and sowed weeds all through the wheat, and then went off.
When the crop grew and bore fruit, the weeds appeared as well.
The slaves of the householder came to him and said,
‘Master, did you not sow good seed in your field?
Where have the weeds come from?’
He answered, ‘An enemy has done this.’
His slaves said to him,
‘Do you want us to go and pull them up?’
He replied, ‘No, if you pull up the weeds
you might uproot the wheat along with them.
Let them grow together until harvest;
then at harvest time I will say to the harvesters,
“First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles for burning;
but gather the wheat into my barn.”’”

He proposed another parable to them.

“The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed
that a person took and sowed in a field.
It is the smallest of all the seeds,
yet when full-grown it is the largest of plants.
It becomes a large bush,
and the ‘birds of the sky come and dwell in its branches.’”

He spoke to them another parable.

“The kingdom of heaven is like yeast
that a woman took and mixed with three measures of wheat flour
until the whole batch was leavened.”

All these things Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables.

He spoke to them only in parables,
to fulfill what had been said through the prophet:
*I will open my mouth in parables,
I will announce what has lain hidden from the foundation
of the world.*

Then, dismissing the crowds, he went into the house.

His disciples approached him and said,
“Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field.”
He said in reply, “He who sows good seed is the Son of Man,
the field is the world, the good seed the children of the kingdom.

The weeds are the children of the evil one,
and the enemy who sows them is the devil.
The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels.
Just as weeds are collected and burned up with fire,
so will it be at the end of the age.
The Son of Man will send his angels,
and they will collect out of his kingdom
all who cause others to sin and all evildoers.
They will throw them into the fiery furnace,
where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth.
Then the righteous will shine like the sun
in the kingdom of their Father.
Whoever has ears ought to hear.”

or

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