Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time  
July 23, 2017

Leader: A Reading from the Holy Gospel According to Matthew (Mt 13: 24 - 43)

ALL: Glory to You, O Lord.

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.”

The Gospel of the Lord.

ALL: Praise to You, Lord Jesus Christ.

Let us pray.

Dear Lord, thank You for your patience and forbearance.  
Look with mercy on all Your children.  
Help us to grow in faith and yield a bountiful harvest.  
Give us discernment so we may distinguish what is good from what is evil.  
Teach us to be merciful, as You are merciful.
Will We Shine Like the Sun? We with Ears Ought to Hear... *

Although this translation of Matthew’s Gospel uses the generic term “weeds” to describe the undesirable plants growing along with the wheat, it is commonly recognized that Jesus was referring to darnel, a weed that bears a close resemblance to wheat in its early stages of growth. This raises the possibility of Jesus reminding us that we are not always able to distinguish what (or who) is good and what (or who) is evil. Although this is not included in Jesus’ explanation of the parable, it is certainly in keeping with His frequent admonition not to judge others. Like so many of Jesus parables, additional layers of meaning may be discerned by reflection. The Master who sowed good seed shows his patience and tolerance by instructing his slaves to allow the wheat and the weeds to grow together until harvest, lest the wheat be harmed in the uprooting of the weeds. This is clearly a reminder of the forbearance of God, Who sends His rain on the just and the unjust, but it also may be reminder that we should be patient with one another.

This aspect of the parable is given greater credence in Jesus’ explanation of the parable. Note that He says, “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.” Those they will “collect out of his kingdom” may refer to people within the Church community who cause dissension and serve as obstacles to the faith of others. As within the world, within the Church the wheat and weeds are allowed to grow together. However, there ultimately will come the judgment when the wheat and weeds meet very different fates.

The parable of the weeds in the field, like the parable of the sower presented in the passage from Matthew that precedes this reading, includes an underlying optimism that is fulfilled in the bounty of the harvest despite seemingly overwhelming obstacles. The parable of the mustard seed and the leaven also underscore the inevitable success of Jesus’ mission to gather a people of faith into God’s kingdom, from what seemed at the time to be small beginnings. The gentle humility of Jesus was a severe obstacle to faith for the religious leaders of His day and even caused His own disciples to question His methods. The public ministry of Our Lord was far more effective than anyone could fathom at the time. There is also a richness of instruction in His parables that a casual reading will fail to appreciate.

* See The Collegeville Bible Commentary and The Jerome Biblical Commentary for additional discussion

Questions for a Quiet Moment:

Do I sometimes look at the wheat and see weeds?

Do I sometimes look at the weeds and see wheat?

Do I find it difficult not to judge others?

Do I judge myself relative to others?