

Sunday Homily

16TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

19 JULY 2020

YEAR A

DIVINE OFFICE WEEK IV

“Let them both grow till the harvest.”

Illustration

In the 1950s, faced with the spread of Soviet and Chinese communism, the United States turned in on itself to root out the enemy within. Home-grown communists were believed to be everywhere – from Hollywood actors and directors, to lawyers, civil rights workers, teachers and trade unionists. J. Edgar Hoover’s FBI spearheaded the efforts to weed out this internal threat. There was an atmosphere of mistrust and fear as friends and colleagues denounced each other, thousands of government workers were dismissed without just cause, while other people, such as the great Charlie Chaplin, abandoned the USA in search of greater freedom abroad. The very standards and values of democracy which the US government was so determined to defend were in fact being eroded by the corrupt methods used to identify the so-called “Reds under the bed”.

Gospel Teaching

The desire to root out perceived evil is a universal temptation for humanity. Hitler’s concentration camps, Stalin’s purges, China’s Cultural Revolution, the Spanish Inquisition and the witch-hunts of medieval Europe – humanity’s history is littered with the bloody attempts to create by force a pure and uncontaminated society.

Religion is particularly prone to the desire to create a perfect community of the saved. After all, isn’t that the point of faith – to strive for perfection and to root out sin? So it is striking to hear Jesus warn against such zeal. In response no doubt to questions about how the faithful should respond to the presence of evil in the world – and perhaps even within the community of believers – Jesus rejects the solution of the witch-hunt and inquisition: let both weed and wheat grow together, side by side, until the harvest.

Only God can judge the human heart, and if mere human beings set themselves up to be judge, jury and executioner, then the long dark history of persecutions, show trials and extermination camps provides ample evidence that the good are inevitably going to be destroyed along with the bad, the wheat will be pulled up with the darnel.

That is not the way with the kingdom of God. The other two parables go on to show that the kingdom is not to be imposed by force and violence. It is a kingdom that grows gradually – even from small beginnings – like the mustard seed. Such

growth needs time, it has a rhythm all of its own – God’s rhythm. And the effect of the kingdom is that it gradually transforms people from within – like yeast which turns the dough into nourishing bread. There is no room for compulsion or imposition in the kingdom.

Human kingdoms and empires might grow by means of conquest or force, but the kingdom of God grows when people respond to it freely, when there is good soil – a receptive heart, which can bring forth a rich harvest of good works. The seed of the kingdom has the power to transform both individuals and the world. But never by force, and never in a hurry.

Application

Today’s first reading provides the key to God’s patience: God’s delay in uprooting evil is to provide us with the hope and opportunity of repentance. Just as every community is composed of good and bad, so it is with every individual. Our lives are a mixture of wheat and darnel. The Lord is patient in order to allow us to respond to his love, so that our wheat may ripen, the seed of God’s word may grow within us and our true selves may flourish.

God gives us the time to show by our lives that our fundamental choice is for the values of the kingdom – that we choose to be life-giving wheat rather than life-choking weeds. And if we accept this time as a moment of grace, then we will learn from God to be equally patient and compassionate towards our brothers and sisters, as the book of Wisdom tells us.

The way of the people of the kingdom is not to do violence to ourselves or to others, but to allow God’s gentle and persistent love to bring forth a harvest of good works within us. If we focus on the good in our lives and our world – if we allow God’s kingdom to grow within us and transform our lives – then we need not be concerned with the darnel. God can deal with that in God’s good time. Today we rejoice that the Lord is patient and mild in judgement – and gives us all time to grow into kingdom people.