

Homily for the 16th Sunday in Ordinary Time, A, July 19, 2020

Today we are in the parable section of St. Matthew's Gospel. We read that Jesus tells us what the Kingdom of Heaven is like. He gives us three parables but I just want to focus on one of them. But to begin with, let me ask you a question – what image comes to mind when you hear the words: Kingdom of Heaven? Do you picture this kingdom of heaven as paradise, i.e. the place we hope to go to sometime in the future? Probably! But that is not what Matthew means when he says the "*Kingdom of heaven.*" Matthew is writing his gospel for Jewish Christians of the 1st Century and they would avoid using the sacred name of God, so he uses the word "*heaven*" rather than the word "*God.*" What then does the term *Kingdom of heaven mean?* If it doesn't mean a place where God lives, what does it mean? It means the ***reign of God*** or simply our relationship with God. In this relationship or reign with God, we try to live as good Christians by keeping the basic command of Jesus: "*Love one another as I have loved you.*"

Now let us turn to the parable of the Wheat and the Weeds. In the context of Jesus's preaching Jesus is preaching to the Pharisees who see the Law and the world in black and white and are constantly complaining that Jesus welcomed sinners and even ate with them. The Pharisee's practice was just the opposite of Jesus's. They went out of their way to avoid anyone they thought was a sinner. Jesus, too, was concerned with the Law but Jesus saw sinners as people to be loved. Instead of avoiding them, Jesus tried to change them. By His gentle patience and merciful love Jesus . wanted to change them. For example, many of Jesus's healing miracles are connected with the forgiveness of sin. When we look at ourselves we usually couch our complaints against people that we see as evil in this way: *If God is good why is there so much evil in the world?*

In this parable, the farmer has planted good seeds of wheat, yet the soil has also produced an abundance of weeds. In the parable, Jesus points out that it is difficult to distinguish between the two, especially when the plants first grow an inch or two. This reminds me of a friend who once asked a neighbor to weed his budding flower garden while he was away for a few days. His neighbor did so religiously, but since he was not sure which plant he saw was a flower and which was a weed the neighbor ripped out almost everything. Afterwards he said to me: “*funny how all the weeds were in a straight row.*” My friend was not too happy when he returned and saw his garden!

Isn't this the very problem we see in the parable – *What is wheat and what is weeds?* Jesus points out only at harvest time can we clearly make the decision which is good and which is bad. So, at judgment time God will make the decision between good and evil. One very important point Jesus is making in this parable is for us not to judge anybody but ourselves. Actually, how can we really judge anybody else, anyway? We have a hard enough time judging ourselves. Yet, unfortunately we do it all the time! We need to remember how generous and forgiving God is with us. As the Psalmist says: “*God is full of mercy and compassion towards all.*”

To conclude, as members of the Kingdom of heaven – the **Reign of God**, why can't we imitate the same mercy and forgiveness that God shows? I love what Pope Francis said when he was put to the question about gay people, he said: “*Who am I to judge?*” Isn't that the point of this parable? “*Judge not lest you be judged!*”