

## **Homily notes, live recording at Mass will expand and vary: 16th Sunday in Ordinary Time year A**

The goodies and the baddies are images not just in children's playtime but have always been around throughout human history. The desire to root out perceived evil is a universal temptation for humanity.

Hitler's concentration camps; Stalin's purges; China's much more recent treatment of ethnic groups, not to mention Hong Kong: the cyber-crime we hear of today, as war and witch-hunts of one sort or another are and have always been waged. If not full scale war, though what is happening in Syria; war against terrorism, imperialism, drugs, crime, abortion, LGBT issues: the list is endless as ever.

Life is not simple. If lockdown has taught us nothing else this virus and its implications and all that goes with it, is not simple. We hope that we are being wisely advised, and we are following and doing the right thing; But like much of life, it is quite messy, and not at all that simple.

We have seen great acts of charity, and concern for neighbours, esp. the elderly and those in isolation. But equally we are warned of endless scams on computers or cold phone calls, trying to get you to give banks details to empty your accounts. All reminders that our beautiful and wonderful world is also very messy.

The desire to create a perfect world; to strive for perfection and to root out evil is part too of any faith. 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, wars, extermination camps, ethnic cleansing, provide ample evidence that the good are inevitably going to be destroyed along with the bad: the wheat pulled up with the darnel.

Darnel is a slightly poisonous plant resembling wheat in its early stages of growth. Only when it is fully mature can it be distinguished and separated from wheat.

The parables today reflect the way God works with us in the midst of our uncertainty and doubt. They give a picture of a gradual transformation from within. The kingdom is not 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 of its own – God's rhythm.

When change from outside is forced up on us, it seems foreign and alien and is likely to be rejected or resented.

Jesus, with his parables of the mustard seed and the yeast, is showing us that growth and change must come from within. The kingdom of God begins with the power of the Spirit, which is given to each of us. It is within us, meaning we can all be agents of change, from within. The yeast which turns the dough into nourishing bread.

God's Spirit is in us, as St Paul says in our 2<sup>nd</sup> reading, but its growth and its positive influence intermingles with many negative aspects of our own personalities. To try, first and foremost, to uproot all the negative things within us might hinder the growth of the Spirit's positive influence. It is better to give priority to that growth.

But 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. We may not like it, but it is why the Church thinks in years, even centuries, rather than the latest passing fad or fancy.

Our 1<sup>st</sup> 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 our reading from 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 His own good time.

Rejoice today that the Lord is patient and mild in judgment, giving us all time to grow into kingdom people, so we can go out in peace, glorifying the Lord by our lives.