

Homily (notes) from Canon Philip Dyson
23rd July 2023 - 16th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Readings (Year A): 1st: Wisdom 12:13,16-19. 2nd: Romans 8:26-27. **Gospel:** Matthew 13:24-43.

The desire to root out perceived evil is a universal temptation for humanity. Hitler's concentration camps, Stalin's purges, China's cultural revolution; genocides and ethnic cleansing across parts of Africa, the Middle East and Asia. The Inquisition, the witch-hunts of medieval Europe.

Humanity is littered with the bloody attempts to create by force a pure and uncontaminated society. Many people say religion causes wars and they want nothing to do with it. Religion can be 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, 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 pulled up with the darnel.

One commentator on this parable reminds: 'as the Lord himself explains the weed/darnel are the offspring of the evil one.' We are ever reminded that evil is all around: we say the devil is very strong. We counteract with good. That is the way with the Kingdom of God. We cannot force the kingdom.

The Dean of King's, as we left for ordination said: **“You can only love people into the kingdom.”**

In these rapidly changing times our inherited values, family rules, social practices, fashions of dress and modes of behaviour are ever questioned. All we can do, as Jesus does, is give respect and show his beautiful attitudes, that indeed transform all life.

The other two parables also 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 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 usually grow by means of conquest or force, as we are seeing in Ukraine, 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.

Our 1st reading provides the key to God's patience: God's delay in uprooting evil is to provide us with 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.