

Today's Gospel continues from last week with the next three parables in Chapter 13 of Matthew's Gospel. We can't discuss every parable so I will concentrate on the important parable on the mercy of God. Jesus explains the first parable of the *wheat and the weeds*. The Pharisees believe that the Kingdom of God is only for saints, and sinners should be ruthlessly weeded out. But Jesus does not agree, as this parable shows. The main point of the parable is clear. Up to the Last Judgment, the Kingdom of God will be a mixed bag of good and evil.

In the world around us, good and bad people mix, just like the wheat and weeds growing in the same field. Jesus places before us the awful dilemma of living with a situation that is both good and evil. The crop of wheat growing together with the weeds is a powerful image of the world in which we live today.

Why does God who is *all good* allow evil to flourish in our world? It would seem to be a great blessing if God were to eliminate from our midst the terrorists, the abusers, the abortionists, as well as the angry neighbour, which is to name some of the people who spoil the image of human goodness and dignity. But it is not happening. God is not eliminating the evil people.

If God were to remove all evil people from the world, His gift to us of *free will* would have no meaning. People would be just like robots to God. It is only because we can choose between good and evil that our choice is so important. God has given every person on earth the freedom to decide which path they want to travel on. If God destroyed every person who succumbs to evil, there wouldn't be many people left. The problem of evil is not God's problem, it's ours.

Every human heart contains a mixture of good and evil. We are a sinful people and we should be conscious of our failings. Life is more complicated than drawing clear-cut lines between saints and sinners. Who in this world is not without sin? Who is like pure wheat with no mixture of weeds? Jesus has sown good seed in each of us. He has preached the Word of God which is springing up as the wheat, but Satan has also sown so many seeds of hate, envy, anger, and pride. We know that there are times

when good people allow the weeds of Satan to creep into their hearts when they choose to give in to sin.

Sometimes the people we describe as “good” may be struggling with anger, pride, doubts and other types of sin within them. It took St. Francis de Sales twenty years to conquer his quick temper. His manner of acting was so overflowing with good nature and kindness that no one ever suspected he had such a problem.

Other people we describe as “bad” may have in them love, repentance, compassion for the sick and poor, and mercy for all people. Do we want to leave this world to face God in judgment when the field of wheat in our lives still contains weeds? We ourselves are blessed that our God is so good, so forgiving, and so patient.

We find in St. Matthew’s Gospel that Jesus did not separate Himself from the sinners. After calling Matthew to follow Him, Jesus went to a house and sat at dinner with the tax collectors and sinners. The Pharisees said to the Apostles, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” Jesus hears the Pharisees and says, “Those who are well do not need a physician, but the sick do. . . ‘I desire mercy . . .’ I did not come to call the righteous but sinners.” (Matthew 9:11-13)

The Good News of God is that it is never too late for a sinner to turn back to God. Judging others before God does is foolish and risky. Even the most hardened of sinners has the freedom to repent. The reason God is not quick in pulling out our weeds of sin is that He patiently waits for the sinners to repent.

In 1887, Henri Panzini was found guilty of a brutal triple murder in Paris. Fourteen-year-old Theresa Martin, hearing he was unrepentant, began praying day and night that he would not go to hell. She then received news that as Henri’s head was placed under the guillotine, he reached out for a crucifix a priest was holding and kissed it three times. Theresa Martin, who was later canonized St. Therese of the Little Flower, shows us that we should pray for the conversion of sinners.

The Church does not isolate itself from a world of sinfulness or from those who do not respond to Christ. As members of Christ’s Church, we must all share the patience of God by forgiving the wrongdoings of others. Many of us will find this quite challenging to do, as we may be harsh or judgmental by nature. The truth is that it is not

our right to judge others. That right belongs to God alone. Jesus said, "Do not judge, so that you may not be judged." (Matthew 7:1).

It's so easy, like the Pharisees were doing, to categorize people and pin the label *sinner* on them, forgetting how appearances are so often deceptive. While we must reject their sin, we must never stop loving the sinner. God gives all people the gift of time in this world to root out the sin in their own hearts because He "wills everyone to be saved" (1 Tim. 2:4).

In St. John's Gospel there is the story of scribes and Pharisees roughly dragging a woman to the centre of the court and making her stand before all of them. They say to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" Jesus says to them, "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her."

One by one the scribes and Pharisees drop their stones and silently walk away. Jesus bends and writes on the ground and afterwards straightens up and says to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No, one, sir." And Jesus says, "Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again." Jesus gives the woman, and He gives us, a second chance "not to sin again."

The Gospel story gives us an insight into the life of Jesus whose power is best displayed in mercy and forgiveness. He is at all times concerned with the conversion of people but never with their destruction. With Him no one is ever written off or considered beyond redemption. God cares for everybody, but especially for those whose lives are choked by sin. By wanting to judge the wrongs of society, we can sometimes forget that it is God's world and it is His place to do it.

What should we do? The emphasis in today's Gospel is about showing mercy and patience to those we consider sinners until God makes His great gathering on Judgment Day. At this final judgment, evil will be defeated, and the righteous "will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father."

In the meantime, as members of Christ's Church, we all share the tasks of having the patience of God by forgiving the faults of others. Evil can be overcome by good and by prayer and by our love. As far as we ourselves are concerned, the best thing we can

do is to take a good look into our own field, into our own heart. If we find some weeds there, as no doubt we will, we are to try to rid ourselves of them by repentance and making a good Confession. Then we will mature into becoming the good wheat, minus the weeds, which is how Christ wants us to live.