

**16<sup>th</sup> SUNDAY in Ordinary Time: The Reflection is on Matthew 13:24-30**

Last week we talked about planting seeds. **This week we're talking about pulling weeds.** The two go together. Every gardener knows that planting seeds is the easy part of having a successful garden. It is much more time consuming to weed that same garden. And it's hard work. As someone has said: "*When weeding, the best way to make sure you are removing a weed and not a valuable plant is to pull on it. If it comes out of the ground easily, it is a valuable plant.*" There is a corollary to that truth: "*To distinguish flowers from weeds, simply pull up everything. What grows back is weeds.*"

Some of you can relate to one unknown homemaker who wrote: I don't do windows because . . . I love birds and don't want one to run into a clean window and get hurt. I don't wax floors because . . . I am terrified a guest will slip and get hurt then I'll feel terrible (*plus they may sue me.*). I don't disturb cobwebs because . . . I want every creature to have a home of their own. I don't Spring Clean because . . . I love all the seasons and don't want the others to get jealous. I don't put things away because . . . my husband will never be able to find them again. I don't do gourmet meals when I entertain because . . . I don't want my guests to stress out over what to make when they invite me over for dinner. I don't iron because . . . I choose to believe them when they say "Permanent Press." And finally: I don't pull weeds in the garden because . . . I don't want to get in God's way, He is an excellent designer! I doubt than anyone likes pulling weeds, including God. In today's lesson Jesus tells a parable.

**"The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared. "The owner's servants came to him and said, 'Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?' "An enemy did this,' he replied. "The servants asked him, 'Do you want us to go and pull them up?' "No,' he answered, 'because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time, I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn....."**

On its surface, there is not much to be said about this parable except make sure you're not a weed, because one day the weeds will be thrown into the fiery furnace. The weeds are all those "who do evil." Oops. That's a little disconcerting. The farmer in this Jesus' story planted good seed in his field and expected a bumper harvest. Soon a host of sturdy green shoots sprang up, covering the field from end to end. It looked as if his expectations would be fulfilled.

But then one morning he discovered weeds growing among the young shoots of wheat. Not just an odd weed here and there, but weeds everywhere. He got a terrible shock. He was bitterly disappointed. When he looked at the field now, all he could see were the weeds. The wheat seemed to have disappeared. Sooner or later the weeds appear in our field — a friend betrays us, a partner disappoints us or proves unfaithful .... We are shocked and hurt at the appearance of evil. The badness of bad people we expect, and can forearm Ourselves against it. But the badness of good people takes us by surprise, and hurts all the more. For a while at least, we tend to see everything as bad — we become very negative.

What could the farmer do? The obvious answer was to pull the weeds up. However, this proved impossible. They were growing so close to the stalks of wheat that he could not uproot them without uprooting the wheat as well.

**So what did he do? Well, for one thing he calmed down.** This enabled him to see things in better perspective. True, there were some weeds in his precious field. But there was wheat there too, wheat that was just as green and vibrant as ever. He would have to be humble and patient. He would have to work hard on the wheat, coaxing and encouraging it in the hope that it would outgrow the weeds.

We mustn't despair. The world is a mixture of light and darkness, good and evil. Wheat and weeds grow side by side in the same person, indeed, in ourselves. But all is not lost — there is good there too. No one understood this better than Jesus. Even in the small garden (**the twelve apostles**) which he tended carefully for three years, the weeds persisted, yet he didn't write it off.

***We have to work on the good. But what about the evil? Evil has to be resisted. But we have to do so in such a way that we not do further evil in the process. Evil can be overcome only by good.*** So the farmer set to work. It wasn't easy. But he tried to concentrate on the wheat. This proved a great help. When he looked closely at it he noticed that it was by reaching and straining upwards that it grew. He took heart from this because it meant that by making the wheat struggle harder, the weeds were actually having a beneficial effect on the crop.

Because of the presence of evil we have to struggle. But it is through struggle that we grow. Struggle awakens all that is good and precious within us. Indeed, the presence of evil could even be said to be necessary. Unless we had to make a choice between good and evil no virtue would be possible.

On harvest day the farmer separated the weeds from the wheat. He reaped a fine harvest. Even though it fell short of the hundred per cent he had hoped for, the quality was excellent. And for some strange reason, he got more satisfaction from reaping that harvest than from any other. **There is more joy when the victory is hard-won. The parable is both realistic and optimistic. In the end good triumphs. Truth and goodness are invincible.**

I like to quote the late Fr. Andrew Greeley who once said ***"if you ever find a perfect church, by all means join it; just know that once you join it, it will longer be perfect."*** Imperfection is all around us, in our nation and in other nations, in our friends and members of our family. ***The important lesson in today's parable that in the end all things will be made right.***