

WEEDS AMONG THE WHEAT: 16TH SUNDAY A

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People who are perfectionists get a great deal done. They show a marvellous attention to detail. But there is a shadow side to this. They may become workaholics, and be unable to relax, to stop and think, to stop and listen, to stop and talk, or simply to stop. Being high achievers themselves, they may expect too much, indeed may demand too much, of others. They may want others to be just like them, and may even pressure others to conform. In being like this they may, in fact, become their own worst enemies.

We may possibly know people who are so perfect and yet so locked up in themselves, that they have cut themselves off from others – not listening, not speaking, not caring, and not helping.

There may be something of a perfectionist mentality in us, especially about other people. Should we find ourselves dwelling on the flaws and faults of others, if we find ourselves wondering why they don't think and feel and act just like us, if we find ourselves saying with Henry Higgins, '*why can't a woman be more like a man?*', if we find ourselves getting frustrated or annoyed by the weaknesses of others, we are possibly expecting too much of them. And we are possibly failing to respect the individual differences among us of experience, background, culture, character, personality and temperament.

Jesus in the Gospel today speaks to this situation. He speaks of that field in which the wheat his Father has sown is growing. But all through the field there is not only the wheat from the divine sower, but many weeds as well.

Jesus is telling us that not a single one of us is really perfect, that we too are mixtures of good and not so good. And so a husband cannot expect his wife to be all wheat with no weeds in her character, and vice versa. Neither can children expect absolute perfection from their parents, and vice versa.

If this is true of all human beings as individuals, it is true too of all human organizations, societies, and structures. Capitalism and socialism e.g. are not only different. They are also imperfect. In both systems weeds can be found as well as wheat.

The Church too is imperfect. The Second Vatican Council said that it is sinful as well as holy, and that it is '*always in need of reform*' and renewal. Weeds were even found in the original Christian community that Luke tells us about in the Acts of the Apostles. While those first Christians in Jerusalem prayed together, shared their lives, shared their food and the rest of their goods and possessions, one couple named Ananias and Saphira, were the exceptions. They wanted to keep things back for themselves.

Disciples around him were saying to Jesus: *'Let's root up all those weeds! Let's burn up those cities which won't welcome you! Let's put them right and show them who's boss! Let's have the kingdom now!'* But Jesus says to them in effect: *'Wait! Let God be God! Let the wheat and the weeds exist for now! Wait till God is ready to start the harvest and sort things out! Be like God, be patient!'*

This suggests that our basic first response to the weaknesses and failings of others is meant to be understanding, compassion, gentleness, patience, and respect. St Francis de Sales used to say that more flies are caught with a spoonful of honey than a barrel full of vinegar.

Jesus, however, did not say that things should always stay the way they are. No, he speaks of growth, and therefore about change, and about the power to change God puts in the wheat that God has sown. So, through the power of God a person who is lost and confused can find meaning and purpose. A smoker can stop smoking. A drinker can stop drinking. A mean person can become a generous one. A sex addict can become chaste. A narrow mind can expand. A fault-finder can become an affirmer and supporter. A racist person can become a welcoming and befriending one. And if we ourselves are sick and tired of the way we have been living, we too can change direction.

In fact we are not to let the weeds in us choke the wheat. We are to be part of the solution rather than part of the problem. And yet despite all our best efforts, the reality is that both we and they will remain a mixture of wheat and weeds till God is ready to reap the harvest. So we must be like that little koala in a poster who keeps saying, *'Be patient with me, for God hasn't finished with me yet!'*

For the amazing grace of God, that we might accept the things we cannot change, and change the things we can, let us pray to the Lord of the harvest during the rest of our Eucharist together! And let us pray for that intention, not only for ourselves but also for one another!