

16th Sunday A (Matt 13: 24-33)

Sometimes it seems to me that all of us have been victimized by an illusion of perfection. We keep thinking that somewhere in this world is the perfect spot, the perfect situation, if only we could find it. Then the sharp edges would be gone from this life and everything would be lovely. Under this illusion we tend to become

restless and impatient with the circumstances in which we find ourselves; a husband or wife becomes dissatisfied with an imperfect marriage and goes out in search of a perfect mate. Young people quit school because they don't find it absolutely to their liking. A man drifts about in his vocational career in quest of the perfect job, or else he is forever vexed by the imperfections of the job he has. Somewhere out there we think is the perfect situation.

In today's Gospel, Jesus told a parable which speaks to this. He tells about a farmer who sowed his field with wheat, but as the crop came to maturity, weeds appeared among the wheat. His servants wanted to pull up the weeds, but the farmer said: "No, you might take the wheat along with them. Let them grow together until harvest." That was how Jesus saw the world- a wheat field with weeds in it. And this parable was his way of teaching us what it means to live in that kind of imperfect world.

In the Gospels, we see two aspects of the character of Jesus which seem utterly contradictory. On the one hand we see him as the best man who ever lived. Simon Peter tells us that "He did no wrong; no deceit was found in his mouth." Peter knew Jesus well. He observed him under many stressful situations, even unto death, the best man who ever lived. The other aspect of Jesus is that he attracted to himself people with all kinds of character flaws, tax collectors, prostitutes, and a whole array of sinners. And he shared many a meal with them. His enemies nicknamed him "the friend of sinners." They saw it as an insult but Jesus wore it as a badge of honor.

What was this attraction that Jesus had for the imperfect and for sinners? He accepted them and loved them, and they knew that. They didn't have to prove themselves or pretend to be anything they were not. He accepted them just the way they were. He challenged them to grow and become the kind of people they and he wanted them to be. And they knew this challenge came out a deep love for them. He knew that in human nature there are always weeds among the wheat, so he accepted and loved imperfect people. If you and I are going to follow him in this imperfect world we must do the same. After all, there is no other kind of people. We are all imperfect except for him.

Taking a look at the kinds of imperfect people Jesus chose as his followers, we would assume that he used his best judgment in his choices. But even here we see weeds among the wheat. One betrayed him, another denied him, and at one point, they all abandoned him. Still, this was his team and he stayed with it. For three years he worked side by side with those imperfect followers, coaching them if you will. And then the day came for his departure, as he said to his Heavenly Father, "I entrusted to them the message you entrusted to me." And this Church to whom Jesus was entrusting his message has been preaching, teaching, and living this message, however imperfectly, for two thousand years. We need to remember, in case we get discouraged, that even Jesus didn't get perfect results from his efforts, for he was working with flawed human beings. We work to eliminate poverty, but poverty persists. We work and pray for peace; still there are wars. We strive to establish justice, but injustice endures. It was so with Jesus. There were weeds among the wheat. Only part of his seed came to fruition, but he

kept on working and took what he could. As we follow this example of Jesus, we will learn to love imperfect people; we will acknowledge and love an imperfect Church, and we will settle for less than perfect results. But we will never quit, with weeds among the wheat, until the final harvest. The Perfect One, the One like us in all things but sin, continues his life-giving presence among us, his imperfect but much beloved people. And for this we give thanks.

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