

Synopsis for a 10 minutes homily for OT XVI Sunday (July 23) on Mt 13:24-43

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Introduction: Today's readings tell us about a very patient and compassionate God Who is hopeful that the so-called "weeds" among us will be converted. They warn us that we should not be in a hurry to eliminate such elements from the Church or society or the family based on unwarranted and hasty judgment.

Scripture lessons: The first reading shows us a merciful and patient God, rather than the disciplining and punishing God presented in the book of Genesis. The second reading reminds us that the Spirit of God goes on empowering us in our prayers and in our weakness. So, we should be patient with ourselves and with others. Finally, in the Gospel *parable of the wheat and the weeds*, Jesus presents a wise and patient God who allows the good and the evil to coexist in the world and blesses the evil ones for the little good they may have done, so that the evil ones may come to conversion before their time ends. "*Let the wheat and the weeds [darnel] grow together till the harvest time.*" In other words, God awaits repentant sinners, giving them the strength to acknowledge their weakness. He calmly recognizes that there is evil in the world, but He sees that evil as no excuse for the good people not to do good with the power of God at their disposal. Through the parable of the wheat and the weeds in today's Gospel, Jesus calls us to be patient with those who fail to meet the high ethical standard expected of a Christian.

Life messages: 1) We need to practice patience and show mercy. Let us patiently and lovingly treat the "weeds" in our society as our brothers and sisters and do all in our power to put them back on the right road to Heaven, especially by our good example, encouragement and our fervent prayer for their conversion. Let us remember that most of us have been "weeds" in God's field more than once, and God has showed us mercy. God is so merciful that He allows evil to exist in order that what is good may grow. He allows evil to exist also because He can turn it into good. Through the power of the Spirit, God can change even the ugliest thorn into a blossom of Faith. In God's field, we have two responsibilities: to grow in grace and to share His Word and love with others.

2) We need to grow up as healthy wheat in God's field, leaving the "weeds" for Jesus to take care of. The Good News is that growth and maturity are probably the most effective forms of weed control. In the end, it's enough to know that we are "seeds" who have been planted by the "Son of Man," and that we are part of a healthy harvest that will someday be reaped by the angels of God. Our transparent and exemplary Christian lives will be a compelling challenge and a forceful invitation to evildoers to repent of their sinful lives and turn to a loving and forgiving God. Our acts of charity, kindness, mercy, encouragement, loving

correction and selfless service can prompt the “weeds” in our society to reassess their lives, modify them and become useful members of society.

OT XVI [A] (July 23) Wis 12:13, 16-19; Rom 8:26-27; Mt 13:24-43



Anecdote # 1: “Throw them out! Throw them out!” The year was 1770, and in a small Italian church, two altar boys prepared for Benediction. Annibale Della Genga and Francesco Castiglioni entered the sacristy, put on their albs, and grabbed the heavy brass candlesticks. And then they began to bicker.

Arguing over who would stand on the priest’s right for the procession, their quibble escalated into a shouting match. Alarmed parishioners turned their heads to the back of the Church to see the commotion, and that’s when it happened:

Castiglioni cracked Della Genga over the head with his candlestick.

Blood dripped from Della Genga’s injury, and both boys began shoving each other.

Shocked parishioners screamed, “Throw them out! Throw them out!” So, the embarrassed priest grabbed the boys, led them to the door, and tossed them out of the church.

Now fast-forward several decades to 1825. Half a million-people gathered in Rome for the great Jubilee celebration. The Jubilee occurred every 25 years, and its grand climax was the opening of the Holy Door at St. Peter’s Basilica. Traditionally, the Pope would knock on the door three times with a large silver hammer and sing, “Open unto me the gates of justice!” On the third knock, the door would swing open, and the Pope would lead his people through. The symbolism was rich: pilgrims from all over the world coming back home to the Church, following their leader through the great *porta fidei*, the “door of Faith.” That Jubilee year, in front of thousands of pilgrims, Cardinal Della Genga made his way to the door. It was fifty-five years after the candlestick incident. Cardinal Della Genga who had become Pope Leo XII neared the door. Turning to the Cardinal beside him—Cardinal Castiglioni, the Pope said “Let me have the hammer.” With a sly grin, Castiglioni replied, “Just like I gave you the candlestick?” Amazingly, four years later Castiglioni succeeded his friend and became Pope, taking the name Pius VIII. Now if you told any of those pew sitters back in 1770 that they had two future-Popes in the back of their church, they’d have laughed you out of the building: “Those two boys? The ones shoving and whacking each other with candlesticks”? Today’s Gospel gives us the good news that God can change even “weeds” to wheat and that we should be patient. (Rev Greg Willits quoted by Fr. Kayala in his blog).

2: “The vine that ate the South.” Kudzu (*Pueraria lobata* of the Pea family) was introduced to the United States in 1876 at the Centennial Exposition in

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Countries were invited to build exhibits to celebrate the 100th birthday of the U.S. The Japanese government constructed a beautiful garden filled with plants from their country. The large leaves and sweet-smelling blooms of kudzu captured the imagination of American gardeners who used the plant for ornamental purposes. As an exotic import, it became popular as a shade plant on canopies, and was seen as a God-given solution to the soil-erosion problem, following the Great Depression. Between 1935 and 1942, government nurseries produced 84 million kudzu seedlings, planting them wherever they would grow. By 1943, there was a Kudzu Club of America with 20,000 members and an annual "Kudzu Queen." So, what's the problem? I'll tell you what. Kudzu is a vine with phenomenal growth. Twelve inches in 24 hours is not unusual. And 50 feet in a single growing season is well within the norm. People in the South have a saying: "If you're gonna plant kudzu, drop it and run." Which explains why some have called it "the vine that ate the South." It can cover anything and choke everything. It can twine itself around fruit trees until it kills the entire orchard -- which is why the USDA (United States Department of Agriculture) eventually demoted kudzu to "weed status" ... with the definition of a weed being "any plant that does more harm than good." The weeds in Matthew's little parable are "darnel." Botanists call them *Lolium temulentum*. They are members of the wheat family, which look like wheat and hide out in wheat-fields, producing poisonous seeds. Darnel is the villain in today's Gospel story of the wheat and the weeds.

3: "Your Excellency, your cabin-mate left his valuables with me for the same reason!" A Bishop was sailing for Europe on one of the great transatlantic ocean liners. When he went on board, he found that another passenger was to share a cabin with him. After unpacking his bags, he went to the purser and inquired if he could leave his gold watch and other valuables in the ship's safe. He explained that he had just met the man who was to occupy the other berth in his cabin and he was afraid that the man might not be trustworthy. The purser smiled, accepted the valuables and remarked, "It's all right, Bishop, I'll be very glad to take care of them for you. The other man has just been up here and left his valuables for the same reason!" Today's Gospel reminds us that we should not judge others hastily. There is a lot of good in the worst of us and a lot of evil in the best of us. In other words, the best of us are still "weeds" in God's garden.

Introduction: Today's readings tell us about a very patient and compassionate God Who is hopeful that the so-called "weeds" among us will be converted, and that we should not be in a hurry to eliminate such elements from the Church or society or the family on the basis of unwarranted and hasty judgment. The first reading gives us a picture of a merciful and patient God rather than the strict, angry and judging God presented in the book of Genesis. The second reading reminds us that the Spirit of God goes on empowering us in our weakness, and, hence, we should be

patient with ourselves. Finally, the long form of today's Gospel contains the parable of *the wheat and the weeds*, an agricultural parable with allegoric interpretation. Through this parable, Jesus assures us that we are the field of God. We are the ground He works as well as the plants He nurtures. We are the people He rests His hopes upon and the people He plants His seed in. We are the congregation He anoints with the Holy Spirit. In today's parable, Jesus presents a wise and patient God who allows the good and the evil to coexist in the world, so that the evil ones may come to conversion before their time ends and God must punish them. *"Let the wheat and the weeds [darnel] grow together till the harvest time."* God gives all of us sinners ample time to repent and change our lives. God calmly recognizes that there is evil in the world, but He sees that evil as no excuse for the good people not to do good with the power of God at their disposal. Through the parable of the wheat and the weeds in today's Gospel, Jesus calls us to be patient with those who fail to meet the high ethical standard expected of a Christian. The parable tries to teach the need for tolerance, patience and the acceptance of God's judgment to the Judeo-Christian community as well as to our own. It also encourages us when we discover sin and weakness within ourselves and challenges us to open ourselves to God's love more and more.

The first reading: Wisdom 12:13, 16-19: Today's first reading is part of the second half of Wisdom (11:2--19:22) reminding us of God's tolerance and merciful patience. God is forbearing because He loves all that He has made (11:17-12:8) and because He is the sovereign master of His great power (12:9-22). The Book of Wisdom, written a century before Christ in Alexandria by a pious Jew, shows us a merciful and patient God rather than the strict, angry and judgmental God presented in the book of Genesis. Today's passage tells us that God exercises leniency and clemency: *"But though You are master of might, You judge with clemency, and with much lenience You govern us."* The emphasis on God's forbearance underlies this reading. The God shown in this reading is so powerful and wise that He need not be vengeful and quick to punish. This God can afford to let His enemies live, for they can never prevail, and, given time, might repent.

The second reading: Romans 8:26-27: Like the previous selections from Romans, Chapter 8 tells us how helpless we are on our own, but shows us how the Spirit of God nevertheless empowers us. The Spirit prays within us and enables us to pray in accordance with the Father's will. Paul tells us that when things are not going well, when we do not even know how to pray, when our weakness in whatever form is overcoming us, the Spirit moves in and takes over. St. Paul understands well the power and centrality of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Christian. The real message of this reading is that we should be patient with ourselves, because even at our worst moments the Holy Spirit is there guiding us, acting in us, bringing us along, though we may not recognize His action.

Exegesis: The troublesome weeds: The “weeds” among the wheat in the parable are a variety of tares known as “bearded darnel.” They resemble wheat plants so closely that it is impossible to distinguish the one from the other until the ears of seed appear. By that time, the wheat and darnel roots are so intertwined that the tares cannot be weeded out without plucking the wheat out with them. At the end of the harvest the tares must be removed from the wheat by hand, because they are slightly poisonous. Sowing them in the wheat field was a crude way for an enemy to take revenge on a farmer. The weeds in the parable stand for **unrepentant sinners**, people whose priority is **themselves**, who **use others** for their own advancement or pleasure, instead of **servicing** them. These unrepentant sinners, unless they cooperate with God’s grace, repent and change their lives, will end up in **Hell**, “the fiery furnace, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth.” The **wheat** stands for the **righteous**, those who have **resisted** the **seductions** of evil, **repented** of their sins, and **battled** against selfishness in order to **follow Jesus Christ**.

We should not be discouraged because of the “weeds” in the Church: Why does God permit evil to triumph so often in this world? Why the wicked are allowed to prosper? Jesus answers these questions in the parable. The triumph and prosperity of the wicked are short-lived, whereas the reward of the Christian who suffers from their wickedness is everlasting. God uses the very wickedness and injustices of evildoers to perfect his elect. “From research and personal experience,” says Dr. Howard Hendricks, “I’ve come to the conclusion that in every Church, 16 percent of the members will never change. But the tragedy I see is that the young pastors are leaving the ministry every day or getting disappointed because of that 16 percent “weeds.” What they should be doing is concentrating on the 84 percent who are ripe for change. That’s where the real ministry of the local Church takes place.” Bishop Sheen said in one of his radio speeches: “The history of the world would have been different if the Christian authorities had shown compassion, patience and mercy instead of expelling Hitler and Mussolini from the schools and Stalin from the seminary in disgrace as ‘weeds.’”

We need to pray for the conversion of “weeds” to wheat: We are called to recognize evil, name it and then to give it to God in prayer so He can take care of it, the way the farmer in the parable told his servants that he would take care of the weeds. God wants us to do good instead of evil, to bless instead of cursing, to praise instead of criticizing, to help instead of standing aside, to love instead of hating, to forgive instead of resenting and to tell the truth instead of lies. The

disciples to whom Jesus addresses this parable include Judas who will betray Jesus, Peter, who will deny him, Thomas, who will doubt him and James and John, who cherish personal ambitions. In the end, only Judas is (apparently) lost, showing us that many “weeds” can become high yielding wheat.

Why we should not treat others as "weeds:" The parable hints at why we should not treat others as "weeds," i.e. evil or wicked. 1) Each one of us is a combination of wheat and weeds. In each of us there are elements of the Kingdom of God and elements that are deeply opposed to it. Even Paul recognized that struggle within himself (cf. Romans 7:21-25). God told Paul that it was precisely through his weaknesses that He could reveal His glory. "*My power is made perfect in [your] weakness*" (2 Corinthians 12:9). Relying on the power of God, we, too, must learn to be patient with the evil ones. 2) The time for judgment is not yet come because the Kingdom of God is still in the growing stage. Now is the time to expect conversion, because with the help of God's grace sinners can change. 3) Another reason we should avoid judgment is that we cannot draw a line which would neatly separate the good from the bad because everyone is a mixture of good and evil. Here is Karl Rahner's piece of advice to enthusiastic “weed”-gatherers: "The number-one cause of atheism is Christians themselves. What an unbelieving world finds simply unbelievable is the presence of those who proclaim God with their mouths and deny Him with their lifestyles. Perhaps, the best defense of God would be to just keep our mouths shut and to live as He told us to. The Gospel would then have such a power and attraction that we wouldn't have to worry about defending it."

Chance of conversion and the need for Christ's mind: This parable indicates that there will be a separation of “weeds” from wheat, good from bad fish (13:47-50), and sheep from goats (25:31-46). But this "harvest" will take place on God's timetable not ours. Hence, instead of asking why God allows evil to exist (terrorists, criminals, diseases, hurricanes, etc.), let us ask what God expects from us. God wants us to take a good look into the field of our own lives to see what is growing there. Let us work with Him to pull out the “weeds” in our own personalities. Then we need to start treating the so called "evil ones" as Christ did. Why did he not weed out Judas who betrayed him, or Peter, who denied him? Jesus saw the “weeds” in their lives, but he saw also saw the wheat. He knew that with encouragement the wheat could prevail. And often it did. “Even the most honest man has stolen something in his life, but this doesn't mean that all people are thieves.” (Dostoyevsky)

Life message: 1) We need to practice patience. First of all, we need to be patient with ourselves. We may not get everything done perfectly this week, but so what? Then we must be patient with the others – those who annoy us by the way they drive their cars, those whose opinions differ from ours, those who make too

much noise and disturb us and those who make our spiritual progress more difficult for us by their bad example and counter-witnessing. Let's practice patience, remembering that, in the end, it is God who controls. Let us patiently and lovingly treat the "weeds" in our society as our brothers and sisters and do all in our power to put them back on the right road to Heaven, especially by our good example and our fervent prayer for their conversion.

2) We need allow God to judge us and others as "weeds" or wheat: This parable was told so that we might not go around judging others as "weeds" or wheat. Judgment is the function of God the Father and His angels. Instead, the parable asks us to take a close look at our own life with the understanding that one can judge one's own heart, then repent and bear good fruit. It is a time to look at our own sins and at the way we conduct our own life, then to make a decision about our own repentance so that we can turn around and bear fruit for Jesus. Our Gospel lesson asks us whether we are secure in our Faith life. Are we secure in the knowledge that one day we will be judged as wheat or "weed"? How often have we been a "weed" in the garden of the Lord? Would we, knowing what we know now, like to have been plucked up at those times? God is so merciful that He allows evil to exist in order that what is good may grow. He allows evil to exist because He can turn it into good. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, God can change even the ugliest thorn into a blossom of Faith. In God's field we have two responsibilities: to grow in grace and to share His Word and love with others.

3) We need to grow up as healthy wheat in God's field, leaving the "weeds" for Jesus to take care of. We live in a violent and impassioned culture. Christians often appear too self-righteous, suggesting that those who disagree with them are the "weeds" in the garden of life. Some are judged as being too radical and others as not being radical enough. Some are judged for embracing doctrinal errors, others for appearing not to have any doctrine at all. Some are condemned for not caring for the poor, others for caring too much for the poor. We often forget that appearances can be deceptive. The old saying, "If it looks like a duck, walks like a duck, quacks like a duck, it's a duck," may be true in the secular realm, but not in the Kingdom of God. If one talks like a Christian, sings like a Christian, etc. it doesn't necessarily mean he or she is a Christian. While we do our best to exercise right judgment as to what is or isn't correct (John 13:35; I John 2:5, 3:10), the final determination will be made by God. Evil will coexist with good until the second coming of Jesus. The Good News is that growth and maturity are probably the most effective forms of "weed control." In the end, it's enough to know that we are "seeds" who have been planted by the "Son of Man," and that we're part of a healthy harvest that will someday be reaped by the angels of God.

WEBSITES OF THE WEEK

1. Pastoral resources: <http://www.bible.claret.org/Resources/index.html>
2. The Crisis Magazine: <http://www.crisismagazine.com/feature1.htm>
3. Online Latin Dictionary: <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/cgi-bin/lexindex?lookup=laudabilis&lang=la>
4. Online Catholic Bible: <http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/index.shtml>
5. Orthodox Christianity: <http://www.oca.org/OCIndex.asp?SID=2>
6. Wheat& weed parable **video sermon**: <https://youtu.be/SXqKxfq3H2k> & <https://youtu.be/kKz3C4jGL0c>
7. **Roman Catholic Liturgical Calendar for 2017**: <http://www.romcal.net/output/2017.htm>
8. **Fr Rodney Kissinger, S.J.'s website with homilies & articles**: <http://www.frksj.org/index.html>