

Bishop's Reflection – 16th Sunday of Ordinary Time

Our pettiness is quickly made known by the way we strike out at those who do us wrong. Vengeful and vindictive, we respond out of pride and anger. True power, or self-control, eludes us.

This pettiness is most evident to us in the world's tyrants, rulers both of the present and day's gone by. But we see it in ourselves and others too. In our pride and inability to show mercy, we reveal our true weakness; we are not strong enough to forgive.

True power resides in God, as our First Reading from the Book of Wisdom tells us. Not only is his strength the source of righteousness, but his "sovereignty over all causes (him) to spare all". The fulness of God's power is revealed in the pre-eminence of His forgiveness and mercy.

Unlike us, and the petty tyrants that come and go, God is sovereign over all and fears no harm or rebellion. Whereas we may lash out or seek retribution, God shows the fulness of his power by extending his mercy to both friend and foe alike.

"Let the weeds and wheat grow together," we hear Jesus speak in today's parable. "For in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them," and both would be lost together. How true that is, how righteous altogether. In our attempt to root out evil, we need to be equally vigilant, if not more so, of the harm we can do in the process.

St. Isidore has an interesting take on this parable, citing a number of biblical figures who were ripe for judgment and could have easily been consigned to the hell of fire for what they had done. Matthew the Tax Collector, now Apostle and Evangelist, Peter the Betrayer, Fearless Preacher and Leader, Paul the Persecutor, Apostle to the Gentiles and Mary Magdalene the Prostitute, First Witness to the Resurrection. Each eternally lost to us, but spared for their and our salvation.

And, let us not forget, we are the beneficiaries of God's mercy. For, who of us can say, "My field is all wheat; the Devil's has had no effect"? Though we might have done our best to control the worst of the weeds, their seeds and roots continue to menace, entangled together with the wheat they grow.

In our battle with the weeds in our field, we become more understanding towards our neighbour. They, too, struggle with a similar dilemma. Both weeds and wheat growing together, their lives are but a reflection of ours.

God shows his sovereignty over all that He has made in his power to forgive and show mercy. "Let the weeds and the wheat grow together": words spoken to His angels. For as God waits patiently, and grants the help we need, his patience is directed to our salvation, giving us the time to respond to His grace and amend our lives.

Often, it begins with a seed, no bigger than that of a mustard plant. Though it may seem tiny and insignificant in its size, God's grace can accomplish great things. We should not trouble ourselves over the smallness of the seed, nor the littleness of the deed, but trust in the One who sows the seed and the soil which He has prepared.

As Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI points out, in "The New Evangelization: Building a Civilization of Love", the Church should not grow impatient in "attracting the large masses that have distanced themselves from the Church by using new and more refined methods", but rather "to dare, once again and with the humility of the small grain, to leave up to God the when and how it will grow."