

Commentary on the Gospel for Sat, Jul 23rd 2016

I usually let the readings sit on my heart and mind for a few days before I write one of these reflections. I can many times find a meaningful, at least to me, connection between the separate excerpts. As I let this process unfold for today's readings, I seemed to be concentrating on Matthew, but then a new synthesis with Jeremiah came to me as I began writing.

On one level the parable of the weeds tells us of final judgments when the weeds are separated from the good crops and are burnt in fires. I remember homilies where the priest made it clear that God was judgmental and would condemn the "weeds" to hellfire. There wasn't as much emphasis, as I recall, on the Master's common sense decision to allow the weeds to grow alongside the wheat lest the removal at that time of the growing cycle cause harm to the wheat itself.

We all know that weeds can stunt the growth of the wheat, crowding it out and taking scarce resources from it, thus making it less productive. Those of us who garden or have lawns can also know the never-ending battle against weeds. And we pullers also know that many weeds send out deep and aggressive roots – topping most weeds only encourages them to grow more robustly. Weeds also serve a purpose – a plot of bare ground will be covered with a bumper crop of weeds in a matter of days if it is left unattended.

Initially this parable seems to equate sinners to the weeds, and that "they" will burn in the final harvest time. But isn't it true that within each of us are weeds, that grow alongside our good wheat, and which are difficult to remove? Are we not both weed and wheat? Do we not do both good and harm in so many ways? Aren't the roots of our weeds strong and deeply engrained in us? Is not our innate goodness always present in the form of our nagging conscience, reminding us of what is good and what we should be doing to bring us closer to God?

God thunders through Jeremiah in a message that presages Jesus' cleansing of the temple. But it occurred to me that it also resonates with the parable in Matthew. God's people are abusing their privilege, taking for granted God's protection in the form of the sanctity of the temple. They have allowed the weeds of injustice, oppression, greed, adultery, perjury, theft and murder to send down deep roots in them individually and communally. They are more weed than wheat. And they may not even recognize their weeds, but instead view some of their actions as righteous. The drive for success, the bending of moral principles, the "little" transgressions may not be seen as the small weed root that inserts itself into otherwise healthy soil and makes it more difficult for the good wheat to grow.

Weeds are an inescapable part of our being, growing alongside our good wheat. Jesus came to show us how to be more wheat than weed, how to be stronger in our wheatness than in our weediness. When we nourish our wheat, giving all its manifestations the love it needs to prosper, there is less room for our weeds to flourish. We don't need to so much pull out the weeds (although clearly we do at times) but make the wheat so strong that the weeds wither and die. Then, at the final harvest, our wheat will be dominant and our weeds will be minimal.

And so my prayer today is for the grace to cultivate my wheat.

