

Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time A/2011

The readings of this Sunday talk about God's forgiveness and the reality of evil in the world. In the first reading the book of Wisdom affirms that God is the master of everything that exists. His might is the source of justice, and his power is destined to forgive. That is why he judges with clemency and governs with leniency. He acts in such a way so that those who are just might learn to be kind and those who live in sin might come to repentance.

What is behind this text is the idea that God is in control of everything that is happening in the world. Even when bad things happen and evil grows in the world and in the hearts of people, he also knows all that. However, he is patient with everyone so that each one comes to conversion.

That image of God as merciful and forgiving is what is at stake in Jesus' speech in today's Gospel. In fact, in the parable of the weeds, Jesus describes the case of a farmer who was harmed by an enemy who planted weeds in his good field of wheat. When the workers realized what happened, they wanted to pull them out in the hope of saving the crops.

In a very astonishing way, the owner of the farm prohibited them to do so because of the danger of uprooting in the process the wheat along with the weeds. Instead, he ordered them to let all the plants grow together and to sort them out only at the harvest time. Only at that time would the wheat be kept and the weeds be burned in fire.

The point of the parable is to tell us that there exists in the world the evil besides the good. The evil acts in the world like a hostile power that tries to destroy the good work of God. It is not only a question of an abstract power, but it is also a question of the existence in the world of people who belong to the kingdom of God and those who oppose it.

That being said, there is a different reaction to the existence of evil in the world. For human beings, the evil has to be uprooted, right now and without delay. God, instead, keeps patience and waits for the destruction of the evil only in the end. That, however, should not lead to complacency, because after all there will be a judgment in the end.

But, why is God acting so while the evil is destroying his good work? God wants to teach us that in his bounty, he gives time to anyone to convert and to abandon his/her bad ways of life. Moreover, only He has the right judgment, because he sees the whole picture of the life of someone and can determine the good and the bad in an individual. Unlike God, we human beings have a partial image of the life of an individual; we cannot even see what is hidden in the heart of someone as good or bad.

In the same way, the good and the bad do not exist only in the world, but even in the Church and in people. In fact, in each one of us, there is a coexistence of both good and evil, a mixture of a good side and a bad side, qualities and imperfections. In that perspective, if God were not merciful toward us, we would already have been destroyed long time ago. But, by showing us his patience even though we do wrong, he gives us time to repent.

Another point the parable teaches us is tolerance and solidarity. If, indeed, God himself lets the good and the wicked live side by side in the world until the end, we have to be in turn tolerant and accept that anyone may live even if he/she is a bad person. If God lets both the evil and the good coexist in the world and in individuals, he is, in some ways, inviting us to help each other to change and become good people and good Christians?

The parable calls us equally to optimism, because even if now the evil exists in the world, in the end it will be destroyed and burned in fire. In that perspective, we understand why Jesus compares the Kingdom of heaven to a mustard seed that is the smallest of the grains, but which becomes a big tree, as well as to the yeast that makes the whole batch leavened.

The mustard grain that becomes a big tree or the yeast that leavens the batch symbolizes the triumph of the good over the evil. It symbolizes also the success of the final result over the failures of the modest beginning. This optimism is not only about the situation of the word of God in the world, it is also about our own life difficulties, the education of our children, the disappointment in our jobs, the hardships in marriage life or the scandal in the church, etc.

We have to hope in the Lord, to do our part of the job and let God finish his. Even when our work does not have the success we were hoping for, right now, the ending will be different. That is what the contrast between the small start and the grand final result of the mustard seed and the yeast means.

That, however, should not be a blind optimism or lead us to complacency. Of course the good and the bad coexist, but not indefinitely, because there is a time of judgment and separation of the good from the bad. That is why it is important that we take advantage of the patience of God and convert. No one can rely on God's mercy and forgiveness without feeling the need to transform his or her life.

In order to achieve such an aim we have to pray incessantly to the Holy Spirit, because he alone knows to intercede for us in the way that is in accordance with the will of the Father. Let us ask the Lord to teach us to be patient with oneself, with one another, and to work for our conversion and that of our brothers and sisters. May God bless you all!

Wisdom 12, 13, 16-18; Romans 8, 26-27; Matthew 13, 24-43



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