

Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time A/2014

The readings of this Sunday talk about the reality of evil in the world and God's forgiveness. They remind us of the importance of God's mercy and his intention to save us. They invite us to trust his mercy and to repent of our sins in order to deserve his salvation.

The first reading of the book of Wisdom describes the inner life of God. It reminds us that God cares for all his creatures and that he treats with justice, clemency and leniency. It gives the reasons why God acts this way, so that his children might be kind, learn to keep hope and repent of their sins.

What is behind this text is the idea that God is above love and mercy. Another idea is the truth that God does not judge people according to their deeds and what they deserve before him; instead he treats them with clemency. The last idea is relative to the need of hope in God and the necessity of repentance in an answer to the bounty of God.

This text allows us to understand what is at stake in today's Gospel as Jesus, through a series of parables, compares the kingdom of heaven to a weeded farm, the mustard seed and the yeast. In fact, in the first parable, Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to a farm in which a farmer planted good seeds, but in the night his enemies came and planted the weeds.

Both weeds and good seeds sprung together. When the workers realized the malice, they wanted to pull them up, but the owner refused for fear of destroying the good and the bad plants alike. Instead, he proposed to the workers to be patient until the time of harvest where they would select and separate the weeds from the good grains.

In the second parable, Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to a mustard seed that is the smallest of all the seeds, but which when grown up becomes a big and attractive tree. In the last parable, he compares the kingdom of heaven to yeast that makes the batch rise.

Finally, Jesus gives a reason why he speaks in parables and not openly. Then, in an effort to let the disciples understand his speech, he explains to them how the farmer is the son of man, the good seed the children of God, the weeds the children of the evil one, the enemy the devil, the harvest the end of time and the harvesters the angels.

What do we learn from this Gospel? Today, I want to talk about the presence of evil in the world and God's management of it. When I say God's management of it, it does not mean that I read the mind of God so that I may say that this is how he treats the evil. What I want to say is rather inspired by the narrative I find in today's parables.

Let me start with a simple assertion: the evil is not abstract; it truly exists. It exists in many forms, some of which are visible to the eyes, others very subtle, and some others hidden, even in the heart of people. The event of September 11, 2001 can be considered as a visible and spectacular manifestation of the evil.

When we are confronted with the evil in such a way, we wonder why God lets it exist or does not put an end to it. According to today's Gospel, human attitude toward evil is not the same as God's attitude. For humans, the evil has to be destroyed right away and without delay. God, on the contrary, pleads for patience and serenity until the end.

Why is it so? First. As human beings, we have a partial picture of the life of a person so that we do not know what is hidden in his heart. Of course, someone might have done something wrong, but he might also regret and want to change. In that sense, God always gives a second chance to those erring so that they come to repentance. That is the reason why the farmer does not want the workers to pull out prematurely the weeds from the field.

Second. 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 bad, a mixture of a good side and a bad side, qualities and imperfections. If God would like to destroy us right now because of the bad side of our character or because of our imperfections, that would be a shame. He would deny us the possibility of changing the trajectory of our life. That is why, by showing us his patience, God gives us also the time to repent.

I believe that it gives us a little bit of an idea of the economy of salvation toward us and toward the world. God does not want to destroy us because of the presence of evil in us; rather he wants us to change and convert from our sinful situation.

Third. Because, it is obvious that we too, in spite of our goodness, have also a dark side, there is only one thing we have to do, that is, to be tolerant toward the wicked and the bad guys. Moreover, because God lets the good and the bad live side by side in the world until the end, we have to be, in turn, tolerant and accept that people may live tough, they are bad guys. Of course, there is always a challenge so that when God forgives us, he wants us to change, but it is up to us to respond to that by becoming good people.

That is why we have to think about the judgment to come and not to be complacent because God is forgiving. In truth, the overall picture Jesus wants us to have is that we remain positive and optimistic even if the evil exists in the world. Moreover, if there is a coexistence of evil and good in the world, it means also that God gives us a duty, namely that while we are still on earth we might help each other to become good. That is the reason why Jesus gives also the parable of the mustard seed, which is the smallest of all the trees, but which becomes in the end a big tree, or that of yeast that lifts the batch.

The becoming a big tree of the mustard seed and the leavening of the batch symbolize the triumph of the good over the bad. 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 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.

Let us pray that God may give us patience and courage to work for the change he expects from us. Let us ask him to help us keep our hope alive in spite of the presence of evil in the world. May God bless you all!

Wisdom 12: 13, 16-19; Romans 8: 26-27; Matthew 13: 24-43



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