

Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time A/2017

The readings of this Sunday talk about the reality of evil in the world and God's forgiveness. They show that God is merciful and willing to save people rather than to punish them. They invite us to trust his mercy and to repent of our sins.

The first reading describes the inner life of God. It shows that God cares for all his creatures which he treats with justice, clemency and leniency. It recalls the reasons why he acts so by showing that he wants us to be kind, hopeful and repentant of our sins.

What is behind this text is the idea that God is loving and merciful. Another idea is that God does not judge people according to their deeds, but with clemency. The last idea is related to the truth that the people of God need to keep hope and repent of their sins in order to respond adequately to his bounty.

This text allows us to understand the stakes of today's Gospel as Jesus talks about the reality of the kingdom of God. First of all, the Gospel gives three pictures through which Jesus presents the Kingdom of God, namely the weeded farm, the mustard seed and the yeast.

In the first parable, the Gospel describes the wickedness of the enemy of the farmer who planted the weeds in a field full of wheat. It also shows his bad intention to destroy the wheat, as it is difficult to distinguish both the weeds from the wheat when the plants are still young.

Then, it talks about the double reaction of the workers who wanted to pull out the weeds, and that of the owner who called them to patience until the time of harvest where they could separate the weeds from the good grains.

After that, the Gospel speaks of the second parable in which Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to a mustard seed that is the smallest of all the seeds, but which when it grows up becomes a big and attractive tree.

In the last parable, the Gospel highlights the comparison Jesus makes between the kingdom of heaven and the yeast that makes the batch rise. Finally, the Gospel reports the explication that Jesus gave to the disciples about the parable of the seeds and weeds. The Gospel ends up with the warning of Jesus about the way of hearing.

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

a second chance to those erring so that they repent. 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, qualities and imperfections. If God would like to destroy us right away because of some bad things we have done, it would be horrible. In other words, he would deny us the possibility of changing our life. That is why, by showing us his patience, God gives us also the time to repent.

I believe that it gives us an idea of what I was calling in the beginning of the homily, God's management or to put in theological language, what we call the economy of salvation. In other words, God does not want to destroy us because of the presence of evil in us. On the contrary, he wants us to change and convert from our sinful situation.

Thirdly, it is obvious that we too, in spite of our goodness, have also a dark side. If that is true, then, there is only one thing we have to do, namely to be tolerant toward the wicked persons 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 persons.

However, when God is patient with us, it does not mean that he wants us to keep sinning. On the contrary, he wants us to change and become good people. That is why God's mercy is always a challenge to us. Moreover, we have to think about the coming judgment, which is the time of harvest where the weeds will be separated from the wheat. Therefore, we should not be complacent.

Why is Jesus telling those parables? His goal 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 help each other to become good people.

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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