

Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time A2023

People are instinctively led to divide humankind into two groups: the good and the wicked, friends and enemies. The tragic consequence of such a distinction is intolerance and the desire to solve rapidly, and even violently, the tensions arising from them.

The ongoing situation of war in Ukraine with its atrocities on civil infrastructures and where Russia wants to subjugate a legitimate and independent country can help us imagine how far human craziness can go.

The problems we face here are complex: Does God see all these happenings or not? Why does he let things happen this way? If there is in the world bad guys and the good ones, why does he not intervene by eliminating the bad ones? Anyway, why are there then the bad and the good and not only the good ones?

All these questions are among those we often ask. Today's readings answer them by explaining how the bad comes within the whole range of God's good creation and what is God's stance with regard to the presence of evil in the world.

For the book of wisdom, God uses his force not to strike human beings, but to save them. His power is great, but he does not use it to punish on human beings. He is gentle and forbearing with everybody. He is the Lord of all, and has power over the just and the unjust alike. He cannot reserve his love only for a few.

While people use their power to frighten and subdue others, to force them into obedience and coercion, God remains gentle and forbearing. His might is the source of justice and his master over all things the basis of patience. Even when he judges, he does it with clemency and leniency.

Why is God acting in such a way? First, he wants to teach us that if we are willing to become just, we must love all people, and not only the good ones. Second, he wants to give sinners the possibility to convert. In other words, God does not love only the just and the good; he loves everybody, even the wicked. They too are his creatures and the only thing he wants is that they change their lives and be happy.

For Jesus, God is patient and gentle. He is not like human beings. While the servants take a great interest in the field, they make the mistake of being impatient by wanting to eliminate the weeds immediately. If the owner keeps his calm and does not share their anxiety, it is because he reveals the attitude of God towards the evil that exists in the world, as well as in the church and in every individual.

Good and evil, says the owner, cannot be separated, they have to grow together and it will be like that to the end of time. The separation will take place, but not this year, not today, not immediately.

Why cannot it be done immediately? Because the line separating good from evil does not pass in the space between individuals, or the groups of individuals; it passes within the heart of every person. We find good and evil in each person. That is why it is not possible to intervene with fire from heaven; otherwise everything would be destroyed, the evil as well as the good.

Even the wicked of people have some good in them. Why just burn them once and for all? “Keep calm”, the owner would say; accept the existence of good and evil side-by-side.

Here we have the most incredible invitation not only to patience and tolerance, but also to optimism. If God has confined himself to an order of things that includes the good and the wicked up to the end of the world, this mixture has its purpose. It is so that we may help each other to become good.

Even if there is evil in the world, it is not the last word. Instead the good will prevail over the bad. That is what the parable of mustard seed illustrates. The same teaching remains true about our own difficulties with the education of our children, the disappointment in our jobs, the hardships in our marriage life or the scandal in our church, and so forth.

Even if in our work, we do not have the success we are hoping for, the ending will be different. This is well illustrated by the disproportion between the small start and the grand final result. A small mustard seed, almost invisible to the eye, gives rise to a shrub that grows almost twenty inches high; a few grams of yeast causes a large quantity of dough to rise.

This optimism, however, is tempered by the fact that in the end there will be a judgment, which means that we are all called to conversion. No one can rely on God’s mercy and forgiveness without feeling the need to transform his or her life. 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 learn to be patient toward each other and to work for our conversion and that of our brothers and sisters.

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



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