

## Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time – July 23, 2017 – Good Shepherd Parish

### Scripture Reading: Wisdom 12:13, 16-19

There is no god besides you who have the care of all, that you need show you have not unjustly condemned. For your might is the source of justice; your mastery over all things makes you lenient to all. For you show your might when the perfection of your power is disbelieved; and in those who know you, you rebuke temerity. But though you are master of might, you judge with clemency, and with much lenience you govern us; for power, whenever you will, attends you. And you taught your people, by these deeds, that those who are just must be kind; and you gave your children good ground for hope that you would permit repentance for their sins.

### Psalm: Ps 86:5-6, 9-10, 15-16

R. (5a) Lord, you are good and forgiving.

You, O LORD, are good and forgiving,  
abounding in kindness to all who call upon you.  
Hearken, O LORD, to my prayer  
and attend to the sound of my pleading.

R. Lord, you are good and forgiving.

All the nations you have made shall come  
and worship you, O LORD,  
and glorify your name.  
For you are great, and you do wondrous deeds;  
you alone are God.

R. Lord, you are good and forgiving.

You, O LORD, are a God merciful and gracious,  
slow to anger, abounding in kindness and fidelity.  
Turn toward me, and have pity on me;  
give your strength to your servant.

R. Lord, you are good and forgiving.

### Scripture Reading: Romans 8:26-27

Brothers and sisters: The Spirit comes to the aid of our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes with inexpressible groanings. And the one who searches hearts knows what is the intention of the Spirit, because he intercedes for the holy ones according to God's will.

### Gospel: Matthew 13:24-43

Jesus proposed another parable to the crowds, saying: "The kingdom of heaven may be likened to a man who sowed good seed in his field. While everyone was asleep his enemy came and sowed weeds all through the wheat, and then went off. When the crop grew and bore fruit, the weeds appeared as well. The slaves of the householder came to him and said, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where have the weeds come from?' He answered, 'An enemy has done this.' His slaves said to him, 'Do you want us to go and pull them up?' He replied, 'No, if you pull up the weeds you might uproot the wheat along with them. Let them grow together until harvest; then at harvest time I will say to the harvesters, 'First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles for burning; but gather the wheat into my barn.'"

He proposed another parable to them. "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that a person took and sowed in a field. It is the smallest of all the seeds, yet when full-grown it is the largest of plants. It becomes a large bush, and the 'birds of the sky come and dwell in its branches.'"

He spoke to them another parable. "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed with three measures of wheat flour until the whole batch was leavened." All these things Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables. He spoke to them only in parables, to fulfill what had been said through the prophet: "I will open my mouth in parables, I will announce what has lain hidden from the foundation of the world."

Then, dismissing the crowds, he went into the house. His disciples approached him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field." He said in reply, "He who sows good seed is the Son of Man, the field is the world, the good seed the children of the kingdom. The weeds are the children of the evil one, and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels. Just as weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all who cause others to sin and all evildoers. They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears ought to hear."

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**Loving Father, you overshadow us with your kindness as a tree provides shade in the heat of the day. With the direction of your Son and the grace of the Holy Spirit, may our hearts produce only the good that will benefit our brothers and sisters. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.**

### **INVITATION TO PRAY**

*Pause for a few moments of silence and enter more deeply into the presence of God.*

### **Proclaim the Scriptures out loud.**

As you listen to the scriptures be attentive to a word, a phrase, a question, an image, or a feeling that emerges. Reflect on this quietly or share it aloud.

### **INVITATION TO REFLECT**

In this week's Gospel story, the servants ask whether they should pull out weeds that have been woven in with the wheat. "No," the Master says. "If you pull up the weeds you might uproot the wheat along with them. Let them grow together until harvest" (Gospel). This parable says a lot. God steadily forgives our weeds and lets us grow without uprooting us. It is not that he wants to encourage wildflowers, and it would be better if they were not there, but he loves everything about us and wants us preserved even in the midst of weeds. This is a radical idea. You and I think we have to be sinless in order to be loved. If not we will be punished instead of forgiven. Entire ancient cultures based themselves on this principle of non-love and non-forgiveness for those who sin. If someone harms me or my family, then I have the right and duty to annihilate them since they are bad persons, not good, and punishment is never too severe. The same goes for the heroes in adventure movies. They fight, he-man to he-man, somersaulting across skyscraper tops, delivering bare-knuckle blows to the face, spinning out kicks to the head, wielding secret weapons and tricks. Finally, the bad guy plummets over an awful edge of the building, and entertains us with magnificent slow-motion shots of his terror as he heads for the inevitable splotch. Everyone is relieved and happy. Except, of course, the bad guy. And maybe the good guy too, since there remains a thing called conscience, and brutality of such scope well might interrupt his sleep that night.

Just for an exercise, pretend that you are the villain in such a scene. Is there a reason you are committing crimes that merit such punishment? Is it possible that one part of you is going haywire but that there is also much good in you, much that could be brought back to life? Maybe deep down you have a voice whispering, "I wish I could stop this ugliness and be a good person". If this is so, then you have stumbled upon the point of Sunday's Gospel. The crimes you commit don't really agree with your real, God-given self. They are bad things, just like the weeds growing up in the garden. But they are only a portion of who you are. Your urge to impress others falsely, to get what you want no matter what, to be lazy, petulant, even to steal, or ... (please fill in your kind of sin), these are never the full description of who you are. God does not rip out the weeds in other people or in ourselves. Mixed with all the crab grass, there is the handsome green that God loves so much.

How about showing kindness to the mean voices within you that urge you to do wrong? They are misguided, for sure, but maybe they will settle down if you just love them as you would a naughty child. Love them into goodness. Can you imagine Jesus saying from the cross, "Father, damn them to Hell forever because of what they are doing to me"? That would be a major case of tearing out the wheat as well as the weeds. He leaves the latter and says, "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do." Forgive the weeds.

### **INVITATION TO GROUP SHARING**

1. Does it give you hope that you can repent for sins? How does this translate into your dealings with other people?
2. Do you remember that the Spirit is present with you? What gives nobility to your small efforts, sufferings and weaknesses? Do you ever call on the Spirit when you are in need? Think of all the ways the Spirit has come to your aid when you have needed help.
3. Can you always tell the weeds from the flowers, or saints from sinners? If you are quick to judge might you mistake a saint for a sinner? Is God patient with you regarding the "weeds" in your own garden? How patient are you with others? With yourself?

### **INVITATION TO ACT**

Determine a specific action (individual or group) that flows from your sharing. When choosing an individual action, determine what you will do and share it with the group. When choosing a group action, determine who will take responsibility for different aspects of the action. These should be your primary considerations.

### **CLOSING INVITATION TO PRAY**

Give thanks to God (aloud or silently) for new insights, for desires awakened, for directions clarified, for the gift of one another's openness and sensitivity. Conclude with the following:

Show favor, O Lord, to your servants and mercifully increase the gifts of your grace, that, made fervent in hope, faith and charity they may be ever watchful in keeping your commands. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unit of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen