

This Sunday we have more parables from Jesus about God's good earth, dealing with weeds growing in the midst of wheat and a mustard seed planted in a field. Add to that, we are given the domestic image of yeast for rising dough when baking bread. The main point of Jesus' teaching with such imagery, of course, is to drive home the process of the growth of God's Kingdom to those who have ears to hear.

Every person on earth is to be part of building up God's Kingdom and never to give up, even in the midst of setbacks and discouragement. In terms of the parable, weeds are to be understood as obstacles, hindrances, hurdles, annoyances and the like, which inevitably spring up in life. The only way to completely avoid such realities is to live in a bubble, where nothing foreign can touch one's life. However, that is not the call of Jesus to his followers or to each of us.

The important focus of this Sunday's parables, besides the process, is the harvest; that is, the fulfillment of all that has taken place in God's sight for the spread and growth of God's Kingdom, both on earth and in heaven. Isn't that part of the Lord's Prayer, when we pray: Your Kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven?

As we prayed recently in the Preface at the Mass for the Faithful Departed, "for your faithful ones, O Lord, life has changed, not ended." In other words, all of life, here and now and yet to come, is precious in God's sight. All of God's creation and creatures are precious in the Lord's sight and must be cared for and cultivated at all times.

With this in mind, God's harvest at the end of the ages is not so much about punishment for work poorly done, but about the completion of growth, reaching the goal God intends for the world and humanity. We may ask nonetheless: why are weeds allowed to grow with wheat? Wouldn't it be better to have them uprooted at first sight? Weeds seriously hamper growth, of course, as any farmer can tell you. Yet the master of the field, in Jesus' parable, confidently lets both wheat and weeds grow together until the harvesting. In the process, the good grain will not be lost or disappear, but will be properly gathered at the

harvest time. This relates to our belief in human free will, the possibility of repentance and final perseverance.

Put in terms of its original context, when Jesus spoke his words to the crowds, in spite of any and all opposition, Christ's work for the establishment of God's Kingdom will not be hindered and will continue to grow to the end-time. At that time the good grain will be gathered in and the weeds will be burnt. "Ouch," we might say, but the point is: be among the good grain, not the weeds, by lives of love, patience, forgiveness, self-giving and the rest, in God's service, whenever and however it is being asked of us.

The other two parables today, about the mustard tree and the leaven, don't about opposition to the growth of God's Kingdom, but rather address and emphasize the internal vitality of God's Kingdom. The birds sheltering in the branches of the mustard shrub or tree is an image of Christ gathering in all those who are properly disposed for God's good gifts. And leaven stands for the driving force of increase and abundance, as anyone knows who has ever made bread or watched it being made.

The infinite mercy of our wise God, Who gives time for repentance and growth, is a perfect example of how people of every time should treat one another. God's moderation and kindness is a model of the love and concern we must have for others. There is always a need for more of that in the world today, as people grow weary about the world or experience personal crises. God may seem absent, but in fact is never far, at the heart of all that occurs, offering consolation, strength and joy. For this, a deep faith is needed, which leads right into hope and best expressed through love.

May the celebration of the Eucharist be accompanied by the ardent belief that God is with us and never abandons us in our struggles.