

Fr. Nick Dant's Homily, Saint Matthew Catholic Church, Indianapolis
Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, July 18-19, 2020, Cycle A

A pastor of a large congregation in upstate New York shared this experience with his parishioners: "Three minutes had elapsed since I sat down at the lunch counter. Waitresses passed me by; two short order cooks and a busboy paid me no mind. My ego was somewhat soothed because a truck driver seated next to me was also being ignored. 'Maybe this counter is off limits,' I said to him. 'Maybe they are short of help,' he responded. 'Maybe they don't want our business,' I complained. 'Maybe they are taking care of those tables,' he reasoned. 'Maybe they don't like us!' I insisted. 'This air conditioning is so pleasant I don't mind the wait,' he said.

"At that moment, a frazzled waitress stopped to tell us that the water had been cut off and the dishwasher wasn't working. My counter mate smiled and thanked the waitress and left. I didn't like him. Three times I had sought support for my obnoxious attitude, but he had let me down. Only later did I realize that he had chosen to practice what I preach."

This weekend, the preaching of many a pastor will hone in on those virtues that our truck driver chose to practice – being non-judgmental (forbearance) and patience. Jesus' parable in Matthew's gospel of the weeds and the wheat is at its kernel all about being nonjudgmental of others and being patient with others – lest we bring judgement on ourselves. The householder tells his servants "if you pull up the weeds you might uproot the wheat along with them. Let them grow together until harvest." Jesus is warning us as his followers to be real careful before running off on crusades or "witch hunts," trying to purge those we consider to be lax observers or evil doers. Didn't Jesus one time say: "be sure to remove the beam from your eye first, before removing the splinter from the eye of your brother or sister?" Ultimately, we are incapable of rendering true judgement; our vision is clouded by our own sinfulness.

Jesus is challenging us to be patient with each other as the Father is patient with all of us. The Old Testament Book of Wisdom reminds us of God's patience: "your mastery over all things makes you lenient to all... you judge with clemency, and with much lenience you govern us" – and a good thing God governs us with leniency, for at times it is hard to tell if we are weed or wheat. Sometimes we are more weed, and sometimes more wheat! The distinction between wheat and weeds can be blurry at times, since we are all a blend of good and bad.

Jesus' contemporaries would have understood quite well his agricultural analogy about waiting to pull up the weeds until the harvest. The householder was not only concerned that his servants might uproot the wheat when they pulled the weeds, but that they might also mistake some of the wheat for weeds. Jesus' contemporaries were basically an agrarian folk and knew that the weed (darnel) looks quite similar to wheat as they are growing together. Better to let the weeds and the wheat grow together until the harvest, when the distinction between the weeds and the wheat will be fully revealed by the yield produced. Jesus said: "you will know them by their fruits. Weeds will produce nothing!"

Jesus is trying to tell us that the growth of the Kingdom of God cannot be rushed. Forbearance and patience are needed. While Jesus does sensitize us to be aware of evil in ourselves and others, and that we should expose and confront evil, the wisdom of the parable of the weeds and the wheat is that most crusading efforts to eliminate the "lax" from among us – people of moral laxity, impure doctrine, spiritually superficial – tear up and destroy more than create.

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Besides, if God would heed the impatience of some of us, who think we are pure followers, where would God stop eliminating the weeds? Would he stop short of messing with your life or mine? Who would be left to build the Kingdom of God, if God stomped anyone who displayed some selfishness, greed, betrayal, lies, lovelessness, prejudice, hate, violence, and inhumanness? No one! Again, we are all a mixture of weed and wheat. We are all in need of mercy and forgiveness from God. As Jesus told the Pharisees who criticized him for eating and associating with sinners: "Go and learn what this means, I desire mercy, and not sacrifice. For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners." Ours is to be humble enough to know that we are all Jesus has to work with. For without us, a mixture of weed and wheat, there is no Kingdom of God.