

JULY 19 & 20 - 16TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

During Ordinary Time we can imagine ourselves walking with Jesus and the disciples as they travel through Galilee. Last week and today we can picture ourselves sitting with the crowds on the lakeshore, listening to Jesus teaching in parables. These parables use images the people of Jesus' time could relate to, involved as they were in planting, harvesting, and making their own bread.

We too can relate to these images to the extent that we have grown a garden or tried to bake bread. Until recently, my dad always planted a garden. Now, I'm pretty sure he never planted weeds, so I had to wonder, "Where did all the weeds come from?"

In today's parable, Jesus tells us that an enemy planted the weeds in the man's field, and in his explanation of the parable, Jesus identifies the enemy as the devil.

Perhaps you have asked: Why are there so many evil people in the world? Why does God allow bad people to often succeed in their plots and get the upper hand? These are the kinds of questions Jesus is addressing in the first of today's parable.

The answer can be found in light of today's First Reading from the Book of Wisdom: God is patient. By allowing evil to exist, He is also allowing for the possibility of repentance, for conversion.

Eventually, the day of harvesting will come, and the good grain will be gathered into heaven, while the remaining weeds will be thrown into the fire.

In the meantime - and that is where we are living, "in the meantime" - the children of the Kingdom are called to live courageously, with trust in the power of God's grace, and with the hope that comes from Christ's victory over sin. It's not easy, and at times we might wonder if the good lives we try to lead make any difference. That is why Jesus told the next two parables in today's Gospel.

The parables of the mustard seed and the yeast teach us that goodness, however small it may seem, makes a big difference in God's plan for the Kingdom. The small seeds of goodness that the followers of Jesus plant will produce fruit. We may never see the effects of our acts of faith, hope, and love, but God sees them, and God will use them to make some kind of difference.

Just the same, a little yeast leavens a whole batch of dough. The disciples of Jesus are called to be a leaven in society. We make a difference by our very presence ... as long as we are doing best to live as faithful disciples. What did the pagans say about the early Christians? "See how they love one another!"

St. Francis is reported to have told his followers when he sent them out: Preach the Good News always ... and sometimes use words. As the old saying goes, "Actions speak louder than words."

We pray that the same may be said about us. When we talk about discipleship, when we hear or read about the New Evangelization, this is what is meant: our lives of faith having an effect on the people around us.

St. Paul tells us in today's Second Reading that the Spirit helps us in our weakness. Jesus also told us that the Spirit will help us to know what to say and do in our witness to others. As last Sunday's parable taught us: If our lives are rooted in Jesus, they will bear thirty or sixty or a hundredfold.