

## GOSPEL

MATTHEW 13:24-43

Jesus put a parable before the crowds, 'The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. While everybody was asleep his enemy came, sowed darnel all among the wheat, and made off. When the new wheat sprouted and ripened, the darnel appeared as well. The owner's servants went to him and said, "Sir, was it not good seed that you sowed in your field? If so, where does the darnel come from?" "Some enemy has done this" he answered. And the servants said, "Do you want us to go and weed it out?" But he said, "No, because when you weed out the darnel you might pull up the wheat with it. Let them both grow till the harvest; and at harvest time I shall say to the reapers: First collect the darnel and tie it in bundles to be burnt, then gather the wheat into my barn."

Then, leaving the crowds, he went to the house; and his disciples came to him and said, 'Explain the parable about the darnel in the field to us.' He said in reply, 'The sower of the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world; the good seed is the subjects of the kingdom; the darnel, the subjects of the evil one; the enemy who sowed them, the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; the reapers are the angels. Well then, just as the darnel is gathered up and burnt in the fire, so it will be at the end of time. The Son of Man will send his angels and they will gather out of his kingdom all things that provoke offences and all who do evil, and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth. Then the virtuous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Listen, anyone who has ears!'

## A REFLECTION BY POPE FRANCIS

Today's Gospel reading offers three parables through which Jesus speaks to the crowds about the Kingdom of God. I will focus on the first: that of the good wheat and the weeds, which illustrates the problem of evil in the world and highlights God's patience. How much patience God has! Each one of us too can say this: "How much patience God has!". The narrative takes place in a field with two antagonists. On one side is the master of the field, who represents God and who sows good seed; on the other is the enemy, who represents Satan and scatters weeds.

As time passes, the weeds grow among the wheat, and the master and his servants express different opinions regarding this fact. The servants would like to intervene

and uproot the weeds; but the master, who is concerned above all with saving the wheat, is against this, saying: "No; lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them". With this image, Jesus tells us that in this world good and evil are so intertwined that it is impossible to separate them and eradicate all evil. God alone can do this, and he will do so at the Last Judgment. With its ambiguities and its composite character, the present situation is the field of freedom, the field of Christian freedom, in which the difficult exercise of discernment is made between good and evil.

This field then, involves reconciling, with great trust in God and in his providence, two seemingly contradictory approaches: decision and patience. Decision is that of wanting to be good wheat — we all want this — with all our might, and thus keeping away from the evil one and his seduction. Patience means preferring a Church that acts as leaven in the dough, that is unafraid to sully her hands washing her children's clothes, rather than a Church of "purists" who presume to judge ahead of time who will be in the Kingdom of God and who will not.

Today the Lord, who is Wisdom incarnate, helps us to understand that good and evil cannot be identified with neatly defined areas or specific human groups: "These are the good, those are the bad". He tells us that the boundary line between good and evil passes through the heart of each person; it passes through the heart of each of us, that is: We are all sinners. I would like to ask you: "Whoever is not a sinner raise your hand". No one! Because we are all sinners, all of us are. Jesus Christ, with his death on the Cross and his Resurrection, has freed us from the slavery of sin and given us the grace to journey in a new life; but along with Baptism he also gave us Confession, because we all need to be forgiven for our sins. Looking always and only at the evil that is outside of us means not wanting to recognize the sin that is also inside us.

Then Jesus teaches us a different way of looking at the field of the world, of observing reality. We are called to learn God's time — which is not our time — and also God's "gaze": thanks to the beneficial influence of uneasy anticipation, what were weeds or seemed to be weeds can become a good product. It is the reality of conversion. It is the prospect of hope!

May the Virgin Mary help us to accept, in the reality that surrounds us, not only filth and evil, but also good and beauty; to unmask the work of Satan, but above all to trust in the action of God who fertilizes history.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What do you find easy to understand about this parable? Are there elements of it that leave you with questions or confusion?
- Do you sometimes feel like you are trying to thrive amongst weeds — and at other times feel like you could be the darnel? How do you respond to the goodness and the sin that is part of your life?
- How do you try to Listen to God? Are might you become more regular and deliberate in your listening?

## PRAYER

*Spend some time in prayer with one another*

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. "Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray")
3. Move to prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others' prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps reciting the 'Glory Be' or similar prayer.