

Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
July 23, 2017, Year A
Father Mike Holloran

Our first reading is part of a section in the Book of Wisdom that includes these similar passages:

“ You love all things that are, and loathe nothing that you have made, for what you hated, you would not have fashioned.

But you spare all things, because they are yours, O Lord, and lover of souls.

Therefore you rebuke offenders little by little,
warn them and remind them of the sins they are committing,
that they may abandon their wickedness. (Wis. 11:24-12:2)

Condemning them bit by bit, you give them space for repentance (12:10)

You overlook the sins of men that they may repent. (11:23)

How naturally this flows into the parable of the weeds and the wheat.

“Let them grow together”, says the master. “If you pull up the weeds you might uproot the wheat as well.” He might have added, “and who knows, what looks like a weed now might turn out to be truly valuable.”

God gives space for repentance, time to reform, because He hates nothing that He has made. He is the lover of souls who wants all to be saved. And so we should never dismiss anyone as a hopeless weed, or regard ourselves that way. No matter where we've been or what we have done, we should never fear God or hesitate to return to Him. He will take us back gladly, eagerly. Remember the father of the prodigal son! We are mere creatures. We don't have it in our power to make God hate us. Look at a crucifix. Is that a God who is out to get us? No. That's a God who is doing everything to save us from the one who is out to get us.

And there is someone out to get us. In the explanation of the parable we learn that Jesus is the one sowing the good seed. He does it by preaching and living the gospel, which could be summed up fairly simply: “God is good. He loves you. Don't be afraid. Return to Him that you may live.”

Those who respond to God's love by loving God and neighbor are the wheat, destined to be gathered into the joy of God's kingdom if they persevere. But an enemy is trying to ruin what God made and what God loves. He sows distrust, suspicion, resentment. He is the father of lies and prince of darkness. Those who are under his influence are the weeds, headed for destruction if they persevere in evil. God doesn't yank them out of the field right away because they might listen to the gospel, repent, and be changed. God's merciful patience gives them every opportunity to do so, but this means that when

harvest time comes they will have been given every opportunity to do so. In other words, God's mercy is His justice. Mercy loves us freely to elicit a like response, justice accepts our response, whatever it might finally be, yes or no.

Fr. Gabriel Amorth, who was the chief exorcist of Rome, wrote a book about his experiences entitled "An Exorcist Tells His Story". On page 22 he recounts an incident during an exorcism conducted by his mentor, Fr. Candido Amantini. Toward the end of the exorcism Fr. Amantini sarcastically told the demon, "Get out of here. The Lord has already prepared a nice, well-heated house for you!" The demon answered, "You do not know anything! It wasn't God who made hell. It was us. He had not even thought about it."

God did not make hell, but that doesn't mean it doesn't exist.

He doesn't want anyone to experience it, but if we refuse to love, God respects our refusal, because love by its nature cannot be forced.. But God drags His feet as long as He can, adding days and years to our lives, extending His love through repeated demonstrations, inviting us over and over every which way, giving us every opportunity to respond. Take the next one that comes along. They come daily.