

One of my least favorite jobs to do growing up and even to this day is weeding. Now don't get me wrong, I love working outside—but for many years, having to go through a garden to systematically uproot countless weeds was always tedious and annoying, especially since sometimes you would inadvertently uproot good plants in the process.

And clearly very little has changed in almost 2,000 years since the time of Christ given that our Lord tells His listeners in today's Gospel an interesting parable about wheat and weeds. And really this parable was perfect for Jesus' audience because the Jews of first century Roman Palestine were predominantly an agrarian people whose livelihood and survival depended upon agriculture. So our Lord knew His audience and that His listeners would understand and appreciate the agricultural imagery He was using to teach them about the Kingdom of God.

So what does this parable actually mean? Well in the longer version of today's Gospel, Jesus explains what this parable means to His disciples. Our Savior says that the sower of the good seed is the Son of Man—or our Lord Jesus Himself. The “field” is the world and the good seed are the “children of the kingdom of God” or those who live as

faithful disciples of Christ. Our Lord says that the “weeds” are “the children of the evil one” and the “enemy” who sows them is the devil. The “harvest” is the “end of the age” or “the end of time” and the harvesters are God’s angels.

Our Lord explains that just as weeds are collected and burned up with fire (at least that’s how they did it in the 1<sup>st</sup> century), so will it be at the end of time, when God will send His angels to finally uproot and collect the weeds—which represent all those who cause others to sin, all evildoers, and basically all *unrepentant* sinners—and throw them into the fiery furnace of Hell.

Our Savior concludes by saying that the “righteous,” or in other words the “wheat,” of the field will then “shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.” So then what does this parable tell us about God? I mean, you might be thinking why doesn’t God just *immediately* uproot the weeds and get rid of them quickly just like any normal gardener and farmer would do? Well, “your ways are not My ways” says the Lord. And so this parable is meant to emphasize the unique, divine *patience* of God. Out of His infinite love and mercy God is *so*

*patient* with us sinners. Our Lord doesn't *immediately* uproot and destroy the weeds in the field because He wants the "weeds to become wheat," if you will. In other words, our Lord wants the evildoers and sinners in the world to change and repent. He wants us to turn away from our sinfulness and embrace a new life of holiness. And *in this life*, God mercifully gives us countless opportunities to repent.

Now you might be thinking, "Wait a minute father, a weed can't naturally turn into wheat." And I would say, yes, that's *precisely the point*. *Only God* has the power, *through His grace*, to transform a weed, a hardened sinner, into wheat. But He doesn't do this *automatically or unilaterally*—He *only* does this with the *free cooperation* of the sinner who seeks conversion.

Remember, *every* human person possesses free will because God wants us to *freely choose* Him, to freely choose holiness—He wants us to freely respond to His love, goodness, and grace. Our God loves us *too much* to force us into loving Him in return. There's no such thing as a "forced love." *Love by its very nature requires freedom*. Now with free-will in this life obviously comes the possibility of its abuse and

therefore sin or moral evil. And so in this life, God patiently waits for us sinners to repent—to respond to His grace by turning away from our sinfulness and turning towards Him and His love for us.

So if that's the case, then what does this parable *practically* mean for our lives? Well first, just because God is extremely patient doesn't mean *we should make Him wait for our repentance and conversion*. In fact, the *first words* out of Jesus' mouth when He begins His public ministry is, "**Repent** for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." Brothers and sisters, there's *no more practical thing to do* as disciples of Christ than *to repent*—to turn away from our sins and deepen our ongoing conversion in Christ so that He may sanctify us and ultimately save us.

Furthermore, the most *practical and reasonable thing* to do in light of today's parable is to repent *now* since we simply don't know when the "harvest" or the end of time will come, nor do we know when our own death will come. And brothers and sisters, once we die, *that's it!* There will be no more opportunities for repentance *after* we die and so really, this earthly life constitutes a choice: are we going to choose evil and slavery to sin over the divine goodness and love of our

Heavenly Father Who wants to give us perfect happiness and freedom in Heaven? Are we going to *embrace* or *reject* the God Who loves us more than we can ever know? We make this supreme choice for or against God *by how we live our lives—by how we treat God and others.*

And brothers and sisters, we can't repent until we know what we need to repent from. This requires a regular and thorough examination of conscience based on the moral teachings of Christ and His Catholic Church. Once we form and examine our conscience in conformity to Christ and His Church, *then* we'll be able to clearly know what is good and evil in this world—*then* we'll be able to identify the sins in our life and get rid of them, with the help of God's grace, in favor of a life of true freedom, love, happiness, and virtue.

Now because God is so patient with us, when it comes to our ongoing conversion and pursuit of holiness, *we* should be patient with ourselves and others. However, please don't misunderstand "patience" to mean "selfish delay" when it comes to repentance. We should begin the process of conversion and growth in holiness *now!* On the contrary, patience means that we shouldn't demand perfection *overnight* when it

comes to our ongoing struggle against sin and our desire for holiness.

As fallen creatures, we're weak and so growth in holiness is a lifelong process that requires perseverance and total dependence on God's grace, because it's our Heavenly Father who makes us holy.

I'd like to close with a beautiful commentary on today's parable from the Dominican priest Fr. Peter Cameron who writes: "God in His providence will use *even* the apparent evil that attends us in life to some perfecting purpose; out of our littleness, our emptiness...God's greatness will flower in an astonishing way...our God is the God who has "the care of all"—of every situation, every circumstance, every moment. God shows His might *precisely* when 'the perfection of His power is disbelieved.' 'The Spirit comes to the aid of our weakness.' We can cave in to our weakness out of despair...or we can pray with faith, 'Power, whenever you will, attends you.'" God bless you!