

Closing Prayer

O God, patient and forbearing,
you alone know fully
the goodness of what you have made.
Strengthen our spirit when we are slow
and temper our zeal when we are rash,
that in your own good time
you may produce in us a rich harvest
from the seed you have sown and tended.
We make our prayer through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God for ever and ever.

Opening prayers, 16th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A²

Proper 11

Sunday between 17 and 23 July inclusive

Principal Service readings

Wisdom 12.13,16-19	God judges with mildness
or Isaiah 44.6-8	God's nature and action / There is only one God
Psalms 86.11-17	Teach me, Lord, your ways
Romans 8.12-25	Children of God, destined for glory
Matthew 13.24-30, 36-43	Parable of wheat and tares – the good and the bad

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
speak to our hearts in the stillness,
keep us steadfast in the foundation that cannot be shaken,
lift up our eyes to behold the vision of your glory;
and perfect our faith, now and always. Amen.

Society of Saint Francis

Gospel Reading

The parable of the wheat and the weeds

²⁴Jesus put before the crowd another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; ²⁵but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. ²⁶So when the plants came up and bore grain then the weeds appeared as well. ²⁷And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, "Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?" ²⁸He answered, "An enemy has done this." The slaves said to him, "Then do you want us to go and gather them?" ²⁹But he replied, "No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. ³⁰Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn."

³⁶Then Jesus left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples approached him, saying, 'Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field.' ³⁷He answered, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; ³⁸the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, ³⁹and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. ⁴⁰Just as the weeds are

² *Opening prayers : scripture-related collects for the years A, B and C from the sacramentary / International Commission on English in the Liturgy. – Norwich : Canterbury Press, 1999,*

collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. ⁴¹The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, ⁴²and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!

Matthew 13.24-30, 36-43 NRSV¹

Comments and Questions

This is the primary chapter of Matthew's gospel containing parables – there are seven of them here. The main parable we focus on today is about the wheat and the weeds, which only occurs in Matthew among the gospels. Perhaps Matthew was attracted to include it by the fact that it contains judgement followed by a fiery end – many of the stories unique to him are like this.

The good sower expects a harvest of wheat and is unaware that his enemy has cast weeds into the field. The precise term used for 'weed' is 'darnel', a plant that looks like wheat. Darnel is sometimes called 'false wheat'. Rather than uproot the darnel, which might also damage the wheat, both are allowed to grow together. In the end the difference between them will become apparent, there will be a sorting, and the darnel will be consigned to the fire.

It is a parable with a fairly obvious meaning. We can see that the followers of Jesus, the 'Church' (Matthew is alone among the gospel writers in using this term), is a field of wheat and weeds, the good and the bad. The Church does not (or should not) play God and decide who should be uprooted. Instead, such uprooting is God's role and he will perform it, eventually.

We have to admit that the Church isn't full of perfect, or even good people – it is quite a mixture. There are weeds in the Church in every time and place. But it is not our job to uproot them. At harvest time God will separate the weeds from the wheat. Our role is simply to produce the harvest.

How many of us would like to be in charge, deciding what is best for the group or for the Church? We could then decide to get rid of those we

¹ *New Revised Standard Version Bible* is copyright © 1989 Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

considered unproductive or imperfect. Even if we are not in charge, we might still be tempted to think who the Church would be better off without ... and hope that somebody else will do the weeding. But such is not the way it is with God. God is of course well aware that there are weeds growing among the wheat. If God is content to let them grow until harvest time, then we should let that happen. Elsewhere in Matthew Jesus says, 'By their fruit you will know them' (Matthew 7.16).

Quotations

1

We are called to be fruitful - not successful, not productive, not accomplished. Success comes from strength, stress, and human effort. Fruitfulness comes from vulnerability and the admission of our own weakness.

Henri Nouwen, 1932–1996

2

If my life is fruitless, it doesn't matter who praises me, and if my life is fruitful, it doesn't matter who criticises me.

John Bunyan, 1628–1688

3

The rush and pressure of modern life are a form, perhaps the most common form, of contemporary violence. To allow oneself to be carried away by a multitude of conflicting concerns, to surrender to too many demands, to commit oneself to too many projects, to want to help everyone in everything, is to succumb to violence. The frenzy of our activity neutralizes our work for peace. It destroys our own inner capacity for peace. It destroys the fruitfulness of our own work, because it kills the root of inner wisdom which makes work fruitful.

Thomas Merton, 1915–1968

Related topics

For further study:

Reign of God; mystery of the church; repentance; social justice; Holy Spirit; evangelisation; ecumenism; social sin; parables; conversion