

Sixteenth Sunday A

Once again the parables feature this weekend. Parables are relevant events or divinely inspired stories which bear a significant moral theme. Overall there are about 33 parables in the Scriptures. Last week, for example, the Parable of the Sower reminded us of God's ubiquitous grace and how it is squandered. The loss of that grace was caused by the environment in which the seed or God's Word was placed. That environment was our responsibility. Therefore, we and not God is to blame for our lack of holiness. This weekend we hear about the Parable of the Darnel or Weeds sown among the wheat, which is related but markedly diverse. One may say that the 'weed sower' represents evil persons in our midst. Where did they come from? Well, there has always been and always will be people bent upon evil, individuals seeking to cause ruin and chaos by sowing seeds of distrust, deceit and disdain not to mention hate and violence.

Why do evil people exist? Why is there any evil at all? Is God not concerned with the sufferings of his people especially the innocent and children? This is one of the strongest arguments against the existence of God. How can we best answer it? Firstly realise that no answer will be ideal or satisfactory for everyone. Of course, God is concerned about the innocent and all who suffer. Besides, it was his innocent heart that was wounded for our transgressions. So he knows better than us their plight. Also, it is from him that we can learn how best to cope with suffering. Never forget that God who is all knowing does not want evil to exist, nor is he the cause of evil. As the Bible declares, sin is the ultimate cause of evil as well as death. Our world is a fallen one and we sinners must dwell among sinners all our life – the common lot of all. We may not, in this life, receive an answer to why there is suffering but we can with Christ and through Christ learn how to deal with it.

What I find surprising about the parable is not that evil exists but that it is permitted to exist alongside goodness for so long. For we are told: "Let them (wheat and darnel) grow until harvest time..."! Why do we have to put up with such people for so long? If God is God can't he just fix it and solve the problem. Why is this so hard? Because we don't like to play second fiddle and because we are control freaks – we want to be in charge. We want action and we want it now. On the other hand, God is whispering in our ears, if we would only listen: "It's not all about you, you know, I have others, worse off."

You see God is patient – and we are not! He sees the big picture and we don't. The bottom line then is that we need to be more patient. Every good parent knows that children need to be taught patience. It is not installed at conception. And as God's children, he is constantly teaching us to be patient. What is patience, anyway? The etymological root of the word is most insightful. It is derived from the Latin word to suffer – *patiri*. Since the sick suffer they are called patients. And we suffer when we have to be patient. For that reason, I detest the usage of the term 'clients' for those who are sick in hospital. Clients are those who visit the accountant or solicitor – whereas, the sick are suffering. So who is a patient person? A patient person is one who is well endowed with fortitude or courage for they can endure much suffering over time. Forbearance in another word linked to patience – to bear for others, or to put up with others.

One helpful thought in learning patience is that God puts up with us, so why should we complain when we have to put up with others. For, God is rich in mercy. Thus, he gives even the most wretched soul so much time to repent and seek forgiveness. Never forget that while there is life there is always hope. This week we have the feast of St Mary Magdalene. God was so patient with her, when all wanted her stoned to death. And it was to her that Christ first appeared after his resurrection. Then, the good thief on the cross at Calvary is a good example of last moment conversion. It was only in those last minutes of life did he seek mercy and stole heaven. One modern example of divine patience was Dr Bernard Nathanson, ex Jew and atheist, and a famous American Gynaecologist, who had established the largest and most efficient abortion clinic in the USA. I am sure that many people would have wished upon him a cardiac arrest when he was at the zenith of his medical career, but it was not to be. Nathanson whose life gradually tormented him sought solace in relationships, he was divorced several times, alcohol, money, worldly pursuits - but all proved to be in vain. In was only in his latter years of life did he finally convert and became a pro-life champion. Then, after many actual graces was baptized and received into the Catholic Church. His autobiography "The Hand of God" provides much insight into the journey of his soul. He died in 2011. God is patient may we likewise.