

Homily 16th Sunday of OT Year A Wis 12:13,16-19; Mt 13:24-43

Last weekend I said there are unsettling consequences for those who fail to respond in faith to God's word and bear fruit for His kingdom. I also said the gospels for this weekend and next, lay out just how unpleasant those consequences can be. So, I'm going to focus on that theme today.

When you hear certain phrases in the gospel, they're meant to serve as a clue from Jesus, that what he's saying is vitally important, *essential* to listen to and understand, because your experience of eternity depends on it.

One of those phrases is "Amen, amen, I say to you." Another is, "Whoever has ears ought to hear." So please ... don't simply set aside the reality symbolized by the fiery furnace as just some fantasy ... borne of irrational childhood fears, or Hollywood box office imagination.

Jesus clearly states the fate, of those who definitively fail to hear the word of God and keep it, more than two dozen times in the gospels. Make no mistake about it, when God exercises his unbounded love and mercy for us, his other virtues are in no way compromised, including his virtue of justice.

God respects our freedom. He wants us to be children of the kingdom, but if we have our hearts irrevocably set, on being children of the evil one, God will not force feed his offer of salvation, down our throats.

He might not like it ... in truth, he definitely does not like it ... but he respects our decision to live apart from him, to ignore his will in favor of our own, to condemn ourselves to eternal separation from him, his angels and saints. PAUSE
Whoever has ears ought to hear.

So let's have a brief look at the parable of the weeds and the wheat. Remember parables are not meant to show perfect equivalence. The kingdom of heaven may be likened to a man who sowed good seed in his field; it's not to be understood as exactly like the man, his field, his enemy, the weeds and the wheat.

So where does the metaphor break down? Well first off, seeds and plants aren't people. If you sow seeds of wheat and weeds, they can't grow into anything *other* than wheat and weeds, respectively. But people aren't like that.

When the seed of a person is sown, is conceived in the womb of his or her mother, there's no telling what kind of person that unborn child will be. Yes, the child's genetic blueprint has a lot to say about that. But it's the choices the person makes in life that determine his or her integrity, goodness, and holiness.

So no one is predestined to be a child of the evil one, predestined to be an evildoer who causes other people to sin. Anyone can be a child of the kingdom, simply by choosing to be, whoever God wants them to be. In fact, God sows the seed of every human being, with the genuine hope and desire that he or she will ultimately be a child of the kingdom.

Just listen to these words from the lips of Jesus found in the Gospel of John. “This is the will of the one who sent me, that I should not lose anything of what he gave me, but that I should raise it on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him may have eternal life, and I shall raise him on the last day.”

Again, it's God who sows the seed of every human being. The devil does not have the power to create life – he can't bring his own children into being. Every child that comes into being is God's child. Satan can only try to 'kidnap' God's children and make them his own ... and he never stops trying to do that.

So the seed of the devil is really more like the seed of the sower from last week's parable. The devil's seed is his word ... his seductive, alluring, confounding, and confusing word. His words are rarely blatant lies – they're half truths – and that's why they can be so easy to believe and embrace.

His words tempt the children of the kingdom to pursue the ways of the world, rather than the way, the truth, and the life, who is Jesus Christ, the Son of Man. They're often effective because they promise seemingly good things – worldly success and pleasure.

Well, just as I said not to write off the reality of the 'fiery furnace', likewise do not deny, the existence of the devil, nor that he is actively striving to deceive you. He is to be acknowledged, but not feared. God's grace always conquers the evil one.

So pray these familiar words often, from the heart: “and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” PAUSE What happens when temptation inevitably gets the best of us, and we choose badly, and behave more like weeds than wheat?

We remember these words from Wisdom, ***and act on them***: “Your mastery over all things makes you lenient to all. You judge with clemency. You give your children good ground for hope, that you permit repentance for their sins.” So seek sacramental forgiveness of your sins, confident of God’s unfailing mercy.

One last insight from today’s parable: if all who cause others to sin are to be collected out of the kingdom, how much more securely rooted in the kingdom, will be all who help others to be holy?

You know, authentic members of the Body of Christ, whose love is authentically Christian, genuinely care about the spiritual welfare not only of themselves, but of one another. St. Paul speaks of this with a beautiful analogy in his letter to the Corinthians:

“God has so constructed the body so as to give greater honor to a part that is without it, so that there may be no division in the body, but that the parts may have the same concern for one another. If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part is honored, all the parts share its joy.”

Therefore, do not be afraid to correct, admonish, advise, and encourage, if you see someone doing damage to their soul, to their relationship with God. Might they take offense at you, tell you to get off your high horse, and mind your own darn business? Probably ... at least the first time around.

But if you do not write them off ... if you stand by them, and with patience, compassion, and understanding, wait for and support their conversion, and if they see in your heart real concern for their well being, and if they see in your heart real love for them, then there’s a great chance they will come around.

The apostle St. James concluded his letter with these words, “My brothers and sisters, if anyone among you should stray from the truth, and someone bring him back, he should know that whoever brings back a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death, and will cover a multitude of sins.”

Whoever has ears ought to hear.