

16th Sunday of the Year (Matthew)

On an early morning walk along the canal this last week when there was nobody else around I noticed how well tended the allotments are. It seems that lockdown has meant that the owners have been able to spend more time tending their vegetables. The one allotment that was overrun with weeds looked out of place. Speaking of weeds I came across the fact that wheat and the weed, darnel, spoken of in the parable we have just heard this morning, look very much alike when they first come through the ground, it is only when they have grown significantly that they can easily be seen to be different, so there was plenty of common sense in the owner of the field allowing the wheat and the weeds to grow together until harvest time.

But we know that the essence of the story isn't about flora and fauna, it is about the human condition part of which sometimes is quick to complain but slow to compliment; quick to ask but slow to thank, quick to judge but slow to understand, quick to see the bad but slow to see the good, quick to dwell on the negative but slow to ponder the positive. All of which invites us to reflect.

The reality of our world, indeed of ourselves, is that we are a mixed bag. There is good and not so good in all of us, just as there is good and not so good in the world in which we live, the wheat and the weeds side by side. Think how some countries are generous in providing much needed aid in times of natural disaster while others exert their military power to encroach on the territory of less well armed neighbours.

Jesus recognised this in his own life time. Look at the people he called into that group of 12 we call the Apostles. There was a political extremist, a zealot at one extreme and a collaborator, a tax collector at the other. The man whose name he changed from Simon to Peter and who would become the leader often got things wrong and was slow to understand who Jesus was or the truth of what he was saying. Look at the people Jesus spent his time with, not the political or religious leaders, those with power and prestige, the so called movers and shakers, but with the disabled, the diseased, the distressed, the down-trodden. Those possessed by evil spirits, those cast out to the margins because their way of life didn't fit or because they were ritually impure. Look at those he ate with, prostitutes, public sinners, those outside the law. He was criticised for mixing with the wrong crowd, but Jesus knew that all communities are a mixture of the good and the not so good, the crooked and the cracked, and further it isn't always easy to tell which is which!

Jesus looked at a person and saw that person's potential for good, the saint literally locked within the sinner, waiting to be released. He was quick to compliment and slow to criticise, to praise rather than to blame, to emphasise the positive rather than the negative. In this he shows us the way for ourselves, recognising the reality of good and bad, light and darkness, right and wrong and asking for the grace to live in his light, to walk in his truth and to promote change and transformation in our own, and other people's lives, for the better.

Bidding Prayers for the 16th Sunday

Celebrant:

We present our needs to our God who is good and forgiving and full of love to all who call upon him.

Reader:

For the Church – that it will continue to plant seeds of encouragement and hope by proclaiming the Gospel especially in difficult situations.

Lord hear us

For political leaders – that they will sow seeds of peace and harmony by their words and actions.

Lord hear us

For Christians who suffer for their faith, especially those in countries where they are threatened with death – that they will know the presence of the Lord and the support of our prayers.

Lord hear us

For Fr Henry Longbottom who was ordained to the priesthood on Friday 17th July and for the Reverend Darren Jones who will be ordained to the priesthood on Saturday July 25th – that they will be faithful servants of the word and sacraments and be pastorally sensitive to their parishioners.

Lord hear us

For the dead, especially all victims of violence, accident, natural disaster and the coronavirus pandemic, and Margaret Gowdridge, Jack Rogers, Peter Halliwell, Ann Taylor, Winifred O’Gara, Brian Knox, Margaret Booth and Josephine Uttley whose anniversaries occur this week that they and all who have died may rest in peace and rise in glory.

Lord hear us

Either aloud or in silence we pray for our own special intentions (pause...then

Lord hear us

We as the prayers of Mary as we say, Hail Mary...

Celebrant:

Father in heaven, your justice has its source in strength, yet you are lenient in your judgements. Look kindly on our petitions which we make through Christ our Lord. Amen