

# CONNECT! SUNDAY REFLECTION

16th Sunday in Ordinary Time | For Sunday, July 19, 2020

## Called to Extend Mercy

Written by Br. Silas Henderson, S.D.S.

Wisdom 12:13, 16-19

Romans 8:26-27

Matthew 13:24-43

OR 13:24-30



The parable of the [“Wheat and the Weeds,”](#) which only appears in the Gospel of Matthew, can be troubling. In essence, Jesus tells the story of a farmer whose crop of wheat is attacked by an enemy who sows the seeds of weeds along with the grains of wheat. Once the violent act was done, there was no going back. The wheat and the weeds had to be allowed to grow together. It would only be at the time of the harvest that the separation would finally take place, and the weeds would be burned up.

Reflecting on this story, [Maryknoll](#) Fr. Ken Tesing, an American missionary priest who spent decades serving in East Africa, recalled this [conversation](#) with his brother during one of his visits home:

*As farmers always do, we went out to look at the fields and crops. My brother asked me, “Look, do you recognize those weeds?” I replied, “No, I don’t think I have ever seen them before; how did they get into your fields?” He said, “Some years ago, herbicides were developed; the weeds and grasses we struggled with in the crops when we were growing up have all been eliminated. All these seeds were just lying dormant in the ground; they could not compete earlier with the dominant weeds and now they have sprouted and come forth.” We talked about this.*

*My brother said farming is like life; there will always be challenges, always be differences. We need to be patient and tolerant, to recognize the problems, the evil amid the good, and find ways to work with it and around it.*

This simple, practical explanation by an observant farmer is ultimately what Jesus is about: humility, mercy and acceptance.

This parable isn’t concerned with backstory or trying to understand why the weeds were sown in the first place. Instead, it focuses on the response of the landowner. And so, when the slaves suggest uprooting the weeds, the landowner refuses: pulling up the weeds might uproot the wheat.

At first sight, this seems like a reckless decision. After all, won’t the weeds be absorbing valuable nutrients and water from the soil — the very resources needed to make the wheat flourish? However, these weren’t Jesus’ concerns; Jesus was talking about the mercy of God.

In Jesus' parable, there is a distinct difference between the wheat and the weeds, but to get the full impact of the picture that Matthew is painting, we have to take a look at the word that is used for the "weeds."

The word used here is *zizania* (ζιζάνια) which is sometimes translated as "tares" or "darnel." Rather than just being a general word for "weed," this is a specific plant ([ryegrass](#)) whose scientific name is *lolium temulentum*. What makes this detail so important to the story is that *zizania* looks like wheat as it is beginning to grow. It is only when it is nearly mature that you can tell the difference.

Jesus makes it clear that the determination as to what is *zizania* and what is wheat will only be made at the time of the harvest (the *eschaton*), when the reapers (whom Jesus identifies as angels) gather up the wheat and the weeds. In the end, Jesus is trying to help us understand that the Church is made up of a mixture of sinners and saints. It is impossible to know who represents the wheat and who represents the weeds. Because we aren't God, we don't have the knowledge necessary to make a judgment.

The Parable of the Weeds and the Wheat is a story about God's mercy and a reminder that God gifts us with the time and space that allow for conversion and renewal so we can experience reconciliation, healing and growth. The parable also stands as a reminder that each of us is called to extend mercy to those around us, and to recognize that we, ourselves, also stand in need of mercy.

St. Teresa of Calcutta wrote compellingly about extending mercy and not judgement in our encounters:

Who are we to accuse anybody?

It is possible that we see them do something we think is not right, but we do not know why they are doing it.

Jesus encourages us not to judge anyone.

Maybe we are the ones responsible for others doing things we think are not right.

Let us not forget that we are dealing our brothers and sisters. That leper, that sick person, that drunk, are all our brothers and sisters. They, too, have been created by a greater Love.

This is something we should never forget.

That sick person, that alcoholic, that thief, are my brothers and sisters.

It is possible that they find themselves abandoned and on the street because no one gave them love and understanding. You and I could be in their place if we had not received love and understanding from other human beings.

I will never forget the alcoholic man who told me his story. He was a man who had surrendered to alcohol to forget the fact that no one loved him.

Before we judge... we have the duty to look inside ourselves.

— St. Teresa of Calcutta (From *A Reconciliation Sourcebook* edited by Kathleen Hughes, RSCJ, Liturgy Training Publications)

## PRAYER

O God, whose mercies are without number and whose treasure of goodness is infinite, graciously increase the faith of the people consecrated to you, that all may grasp and rightly understand by whose love they have been created, through whose Blood they have been redeemed, and by whose Spirit they have been reborn. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

— Collect for the Votive Mass for the Mercy of God in the *Roman Missal*

And so, we are asked to show the farmer's humility, mercy, and acceptance for those around us. But mercy is a difficult topic in our politically charged climate, when many see mercy (and compassion) simply as letting someone "off the hook."

To gain a fuller understanding of what true mercy — God's mercy — is really like, we can look to the first reading for this Sunday: "Though you are master of might, you judge with clemency, / and with much lenience you govern us; / for power, whenever you will, attends you. / And you taught your people by these deeds, / that those who are just must be kind; / and you gave your children good ground for hope / that you would permit repentance for their sins (Wisdom 12:16-19). God's majesty and power are most especially manifest in leniency, clemency, and kindness, and we see this embodied in Jesus' own willingness to offer forgiveness and acceptance.

*Br. Silas Henderson, S.D.S.*