

Y - SUNDAY 16 A (Homily 02)

“Be Open and Judge Not”

(Wisdom 12:13, 16-19; Psalm 86; Romans 8:24-27; Matthew 13:24-43)

The parables in today’s Gospel are very appropriate images for a mid-summer celebration. They all have to do with farming, gardening and baking, very homespun images.

By means of these simple parables, Jesus is driving home two important lessons for life within the Kingdom of God. Those two important lessons are: do not judge, and, recognize God in the ordinary events of everyday life.

Though in general we should not interpret scripture too literally, there is one passage that we can very safely interpret word for word. That is the scripture passage in Matthew 7:1-5 where Jesus tells us not to judge, so that we will not be judged, for the judgment we give will be the judgment we get. We are to take the log out of our own eye, before we try to take out the splinter out of another’s eye. That teaching we can and should follow literally.

Two of the parables today, the parable about the wheat and the weeds, and the parable about the yeast in the dough, focus on not judging others. Every gardener can identify with that first parable. It is a given that once the fragile seed sprouts, one has to leave it grow a little so that it can be distinguished from the weeds around it, before attempting to pull out the weeds, or the plant will almost surely be harmed or come out with the weed.

The parable of the yeast actually teaches us the same lesson. Yeast is a surprising image for the kingdom of God, as it was considered impure by the Jews. The Jews used unleavened bread, precisely because they considered yeast to be unclean. For Jesus to use yeast as an image of the reign of God is intended to be unsettling, to open us to the surprising ways of God at work among us. Both parables, that of the wheat and the weeds, and that of the yeast in the dough, teach us that we must set aside all our preconceived ideas and notions, and be open to the Kingdom of God appearing in our midst in surprising, unexpected ways. God can use even what is rejected to build up the kingdom, as the Father did when he used his Son crucified on a cross as the way to initiate that kingdom among us. Jesus was the stone rejected by the builders, yet he proved to be the cornerstone of the new reign of God.

The young pastor of a small northern community was out jogging one day. He decided to stop by a house to visit the wife of an alcoholic who had earlier asked him for help to cope with her situation. Upon entering the house, he found a drinking party in full swing. Instantly angry at what was happening, he noticed a lady he did not recognize in the room and was told she was from the south. She had just arrived in the community and was already staying with someone. He got even angrier at her, thinking they had enough people living common law already. After visiting briefly with the wife in the kitchen, he had to pass right by that strange lady on the way out. He forced himself to talk to her and got to know her a little. She shared with him a bit of her story, how her abusive partner had locked her in the trunk of a car and left her there for hours. She excused herself for being a high, and promised she would sober up and come to visit him that evening. He continued jogging, and on the way back heard a loud explosion. Racing into the community, he found that a house was on fire and a woman was caught in the basement. It was the lady from the south he had met at the party. It seems that after talking to him, she went to that house to rest in the basement and fell asleep. The furnace exploded, engulfed the house with flames, and she died in the fire. He was shaken, feeling some guilt for a while. In the end, realizing that he was not responsible for what happened, he was grateful for the short conversation they had, and the bond that was established between them. To this day, he still remembers vividly the girl from the south who taught him not to judge people.

The parable of the mustard scene, on the other hand, teaches us to recognize God at work in the ordinary events of everyday life. The mustard seed is a tiny, hard, round insignificant seed that once planted, produces a rather large plant that is harvested commercially and is quite valuable. We are taught by Jesus in this parable not to take the work of the Spirit for granted, and not to discount what seems small and insignificant. Often it is in these small efforts and loving deeds, more so than in big, flashy impressive events, that the kingdom of God can be found.

Blessed Mother Theresa of Calcutta knew and lived this lesson well. She was fond of saying that her work was just doing something beautiful for God. All she tried to do was to provide the dying in India some comfort and dignity in their last days, and did so without discriminating between race or creed. She saw Jesus in the poorest of the poor, and sought only to answer their needs.

One spiritual speaker once put out an audio tape of a talk that she entitled, "Nothing out of the Ordinary." The point of her whole talk was to illustrate how God works in the very ordinary events of everyday life. That is where God can be

recognized best. That is why there is nothing in the scriptures about the life of Jesus from the age of thirteen to the age of thirty. He was so ordinary that no mention is made of the stretch of time in his life. Certainly that can give us pause to think and reflect on our own lives, to recognize how God has been at work in small gestures and what seem to be insignificant events.

The first reading from the Book of Wisdom reminds us that, no matter how small an event or how silent God is at times, it is God that is in charge, and that as the song says, the universe is unfolding as it should. St. Paul, in the second reading, adds that the Spirit of God is present and active in our lives, even to the point of praying within us and for us when we are not able to articulate our deepest needs.

The Eucharist that we celebrate now can almost be seen as a parable itself. We gather together, the weeds, the wheat and the yeast, all in need of God's mercy. We take humble, ordinary gifts of unleavened bread that is the work of human hands, and wine which is fruit of the vine, and offer them to God along with our lives, ordinary as they are. All of this is transformed, by the power of that indwelling Spirit, into the Body of Christ.

We are then commissioned to go out to the world to put flesh to the unconditional and non-judgmental love of God. May God bless us all as we strive to live out these teachings of Jesus today on life in the Kingdom of God.