

## **Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time A/2005**

People are instinctively led to divide humankind into two groups, namely the good and the wicked, the friends and the enemies. The tragic consequence of such a distinction is intolerance and the desire to solve rapidly and even violently the tensions arising from them. When remembering what happened on September 11, the very recent blast in London Underground, or the genocide in Rwanda, we can imagine how far human craziness can go.

From the point of view of faith, the problems we are facing here are complex: Does God see all these happenings or not? Why does he let things happen like that? If in fact there is in the world the good ones and the bad ones, why does God not intervene to bring some order by eliminating the bad ones? Given all this, does he remain master over all things? Furthermore, why are there then the bad and the good and not only the good ones? How do we explain the presence of the evil and the bad in the world which is God's good creation?

All these questions are among those we often ask. Today's readings try to answer them by explaining how the bad comes within the whole range of God's creation; they also underline the real attitude of God face to face with the presence of evil in the world.

The first reading reminds us that God in his wisdom uses his force not to strike human beings, but to save them. The power of God is always great, but he does not use it to punish or bring evil on human beings, because he is gentle and forbearing with everybody. He is the Lord of all, and has power over the just and the unjust alike. He cannot reserve his love only for a few. While people use their power to frighten and subdue others, and to force them into obedience and respect, God remains gentle and forbearing. His might is the source of justice and his master over all things the basis of patience. Even when he judges, he does it with clemency and leniency.

Two reasons explain why God acts this way: First of all, he does it to teach us that if we are willing to become just, we must love all people, and not only the good ones. Moreover, he wants to give sinners the possibility to convert. In other words, God does not love only the just and the good; he loves all, even the wicked; because they too are his creatures and the only thing he wants is that they change their lives and be happy.

God's patience and gentleness is the point of Jesus' message in today's Gospel. While the servants take a great interest in the field, they make the mistake of being impatient by wanting to eliminate the weeds immediately. If the owner keeps his calm and does not share their anxiety, it is because he reveals the attitude of God towards the evil that exists in the world, in the church and in every individual.

Good and evil, says the owner, cannot be separated, they have to grow together and it will be like that to the end of time. The separation will take place, but not this year, not today, not immediately. Why cannot it be done immediately? The reason is so simple. The line separating good from evil does not pass in the space between the individuals, or between the groups of individuals, or between nation and nation; it passes within the heart of every person. We find good and evil in every person. That is why it is not possible to intervene with fire from heaven; otherwise everything would be destroyed, the evil as well as the good. Even the most wicked of people have, together with a lot of dandelion, some good grain in themselves; why burn it up also? "Keep calm", the owner would say; accept the existence of good and evil side-by-side.

Here we have the most incredible invitation not only to patience and tolerance, but also to optimism. In fact, if God has confined himself to an order of things that includes the good and the wicked up to the end of the world, this mixture has its purpose. It is so that we may help each other to become good. As St Augustine says: "Some there are who try the patience of the good, and others who employ themselves in converting the wicked". This statement makes it better understand why Jesus is comparing the Kingdom of heaven to a mustard seed, the smallest of the grains, which becomes a big tree and to the yeast that makes the whole batch leavened.

In other words, even if there is evil in the world, in the church and in the individuals, it is not the last word; the good will prevail over the bad. The same is true about our own difficulties with the education of our children, the disappointment in our jobs, the hardships in our marriage life or the scandal in our church, and so forth. Even if in our work, we do not have the success we are hoping for, the ending will be different. This is well illustrated by the disproportion between the small start and the grand final result. A small mustard seed, almost invisible to the eye, gives rise to a shrub that grows almost twenty inches high; a few grams of yeast causes a large quantity of dough to rise.

This optimism, however, is tempered by the fact that in the end there will be a judgment, which means in fact, that we are all called to conversion. No one can rely on God's mercy and forgiveness without feeling the need to transform his or her life. To achieve such an aim we have to pray incessantly to the Holy Spirit, because he alone knows to intercede for us in the way that is in accordance with the will of the Father. Let us learn to be patient toward each other and to work for our conversion and that of our brothers and sisters.



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