

16TH Sunday in Ordinary Time A/2008

We all have a vivid memory of the events of September 11, 2001 in New York and its effects on the lives of many American people. We are all confronted, from time to time, with violence and atrocities in our cities and families. Similar things happen also all over the world. When we face such situations, the question we often ask is why God does not intervene and put an end to evil? Why does he leave bad people prosper and commit atrocities? After all, is he omnipotent or not? Anyway, why are there evil people in the world and not just the good ones? Today's readings try to answer these questions by showing us the right way we have to understand God's action in the world, and how we have to conduct ourselves in consequence.

First of all, we have the vision of the book of Wisdom that tells us that God is not as we always represent him. He is forbearing, patient and lenient. His might is the source of justice, and his power destined to forgive. He judges with clemency and governs with leniency. He acts so with the world so that those who are just among the humans might be kind, and those who live in sin might have the opportunity to repent.

God's forbearance, patience and gentleness are the point of Jesus' message in the Gospel. The parable of the weeds describes a situation of a field in which a farmer sowed good seeds, but his enemy, taken by jealousy, came secretly and, in turn, sowed bad seeds among them. When the workers realized the perfidy of the enemy, their desire was a just one, namely to weed out every bad plant and to keep only the wheat.

However, the owner of the farm does not see the things in the same way. For him, by trying to weed out the bad plants at this stage, there is a risk of uprooting even the good plants. In this case, what it is better to do is to be patient and let the weeds and the wheat grow together until the time of harvest. At the harvest, then, everything will be sorted out: the wheat will be stored up and the weeds collected in order to be destroyed in fire.

As we listen to this story, we understand clearly the intention of Jesus by telling it. In fact, Jesus confirms the existence in the world of good and evil, the bad ones and the good ones. The presence of evil in the world is due to the enemy of God, the devil, whose intention is to destroy God's good creation.

God, however, does not act like human beings who are impatient and want to uproot the evil ones right now. The truth is that evil does not exist only in the world, but in every individual, and even inside the Church. In each one of us, there is a coexistence of both good and evil, a mixture of a good side and a bad side, qualities and imperfections. What if God would like to destroy us right now for the bad side of our character or our imperfections?

All that helps us understand a little bit God's economy of salvation toward us and toward the world. As a matter of fact, God does not want to destroy us because of the presence of evil in us; rather he wants us to change and convert from our sinful situation. In this regard, Psalm 130 reminds us that if God would keep a

record of our sins, nobody could escape being condemned. But, he forgives us, so that we should reverently obey him (V 3-4). In other words, God is patient with us even though we do wrong; he gives us the time to repent. We better take advantage of it.

The message of Jesus in this parable is a strong invitation he addresses us for patience, tolerance and optimism. If, indeed, God himself lets the good and the wicked live side by side in the world until the end, why are we intolerant and want to destroy right now everyone who is not good? Moreover, if there is a coexistence of evil and good in the world, it means that God gives us a duty that while we are still on earth we might help each other to become good.

It means also that even if there is evil in the world, we have to be optimistic; it is not the last word. In the end, the good will prevail over the bad. In this regard, we understand why Jesus compares 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.

The becoming a big tree of the mustard seed and the leavening of the batch symbolize the triumph of the good over the bad. It symbolizes also the success of the final result over the failures of the modest beginning. This optimism is not only about the situation of the word of God in the world, it is also about our own life difficulties, the education of our children, the disappointment in our jobs, the hardships in marriage life or the scandal in the church, etc. We have to hope in the Lord, to do our part of the job and let God finish his. Even if our work does not have the success we were hoping for, right now, the ending will be different. That is what the contrast between the small start and the grand final result of the mustard seed and the yeast means.

This, however, should not be a blind optimism or lead us to complacency. Of course the good and the bad coexist, but not indefinitely, because there is a time of judgment and separation of the good from the bad. That is why it is important that we take advantage of the patience of God and convert. No one can rely on God's mercy and forgiveness without feeling the need to transform his or her life.

In order 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 ask the Lord to teach us to be patient with one another, and to work for our conversion and that of our brothers and sisters. May God bless you all!

Wisdom 12, 13, 16-19; Romans 8, 26-27; Matthew 13, 24-43`



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