Reflection & Prayer

“Weeds among the wheat”

The biblical image of the ‘weeds among the wheat’ (Mt 13:24-30) is used repeatedly by Pope Francis in Evangelii Gaudium (‘Joy of the Gospel’).

Read the passage in Matthew’s Gospel (see p.3), followed by these paragraphs from Evangelii Gaudium:

"Let us believe the Gospel when it tells us that the kingdom of God is already present in this world and is growing, here and there, and in different ways: like the small seed which grows into a great tree... and like the good seed that grows amid the weeds...and can always pleasantly surprise us.” (EG, 278)

"Evangelization consists mostly of patience... Faithful to the Lord’s gift, it also bears fruit. An evangelizing community is always concerned with fruit, because the Lord wants her to be fruitful. It cares for the grain and does not grow impatient at the weeds. The sower, when he sees weeds sprouting among the grain does not grumble or overreact. He or she finds a way to let the word take flesh in a particular situation and bear fruits of new life, however imperfect or incomplete these may appear.” (EG, 24)

"The joy of the Gospel is such that it cannot be taken away from us by anyone or anything (cf. Jn 16:22). The evils of our world – and those of the Church – must not be excuses for diminishing our commitment and our fervour. Let us look upon them as challenges which can help us to grow... Our faith is challenged to discern how...wheat can grow in the midst of weeds.” (EG, 84)

Additional thoughts

Ten ways...to ‘tend the field’ within each of us:

2. Develop small, daily, lifegiving habits.
3. Ponder a little bit of Scripture each day.
4. Stay close to the sacramental life of the Church.
5. Don’t feed your mind junk food. Be discerning about what you read, view.
6. Contribute to the mission of the Church. Put your shoulder to the plough.
7. Seek guidance from a wise, spiritually mature mentor.
8. Stay focused on persons not things; on Jesus, not religious ideology.
9. “Be fruitful and multiply” (Genesis 1:28). Bringing children into the world, and raising them according to God’s teachings of love is a profound expression of gospel fecundity.
10. Over to you... from your experience, add a tenth point.

Reflection

Revisit the three paragraphs from Evangelii Gaudium on the cover page, noting the gospel virtues and qualities highlighted by each. E.g.,

- Para. 1: hope, attention to goodness
- Para. 2: patience, compassion, persistence
- Para. 3: prayerful discernment, courage, fortitude

Are there other words or phrases that come to mind?

Images & Stories

Think of examples arising from 'weeds among wheat' reflections. E.g.:

- Sometimes we can be too hasty in our judgements. A school was working at encouraging greater involvement of its students’ families in the Sunday Masses at the local parish. In a most appropriate manner the principal appealed to the regular church-going community for their help. He especially asked for their patience as new faces started appearing at Mass. He explained that many students and their parents were unfamiliar with practices and behavioural expectations in church. What might appear to be a person’s ‘irreverence’ is more likely to reflect a lack of understanding and experience. Please, he said, be patient with our families, as they take small steps towards Sunday Mass attendance.

- “I became very disillusioned with a particular group in the Church to the point where I found myself reacting every time its name came up in conversation. I would snort or roll my eyes or make a sarcastic remark. I think the challenge posed by the ‘weeds among the wheat’ is to stay focused on the good news around me, and to not get caught up in negative habits that just dampen the atmosphere and distract from the essential task of missionary discipleship.”

- “I have been a catechist in state schools for years. It’s not easy and I often wonder whether I am making any difference in these children’s lives. A half hour of SRE in their week is so little. But then there are those moments that catch you by surprise; a child will say or do something that suggests that a seed of faith, however fragile, has been planted.”

Think about the community where you live and work:

- What are your ‘weeds and wheat’ experiences?

“An evangelising community cares for the grain and does not grow impatient at the weeds” (EG, 24).

Scripture

Jesus put before them another parable:

“The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away.

So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well.

And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, “Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?”

He answered, “An enemy has done this.”

The slaves said to him, “Then do you want us to go and gather them?”

But he replied, “No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.” (NRSV)

See too Jesus’ commentary on this parable in Matthew 13:36-43.

Points to think about:

- The master is fully aware of the ‘evil planted’ in his field but is not fixated by it. He remains focused on what is the best course of action that will protect the ‘good seed’ and allow for a fruitful harvest. The master sees the bigger picture; he trusts in a future beyond the immediate problem. He is patient. His choice of path is not a ‘quick fix.’

- Said Pope Francis during a Sunday Angelus (21/7/14), “We all know that the devil plants evil where there is good, trying to divide people, families and nations.” We are tempted to act impatiently, to try to pull out the weeds, even though it might also damage the good wheat in doing so. “But God knows how to wait. He looks into the ‘field’ of each person with patience and mercy. God sees the dirt and the evil much better than we do. But God also sees the seeds of good and patiently awaits their germination.” (en.radiovaticana.va)