

[Readings: Wisdom 12:13, 16-19; Psalm 86; Romans 8:26-27; Matt 13:24-43]

Last week we talked about planting seeds. This week we're talking about pulling weeds. The two go together. Every gardener knows that planting seeds is the easy part of having a successful garden. It is much more time consuming to weed that same garden. And it's hard work. As someone has said: "When weeding, the best way to make sure you are removing a weed and not a valuable plant is to pull on it. If it comes out of the ground easily, it is a valuable plant."

Some of you remember Erma Bombeck, America's Catholic homemaker who wrote: I don't do windows because I love birds and don't want one to run into a clean window and get hurt. I don't disturb cobwebs because I want every creature to have a home of their own. I don't Spring Clean because I love all the seasons and don't want the others to get jealous. I don't iron because I choose to believe them when they say "Permanent Press." And finally: I don't pull weeds in the garden because . . . I don't want to get in God's way!

God, as we hear in today's First Reading from the Book of Wisdom, is a lenient and patient teacher Who allows time for repentance to take root and to bring about growth in grace. God is ever hopeful that the children who have been created to be good, will find their center in God and remain rooted in His Divine Goodness. Always merciful and gracious, always slow to anger and abounding in kindness, always good and forgiving, God listens and waits. Then God responds, lavishing grace and fostering growth on those who groan for it.

St. Paul tells us in our Second Reading that we don't know how to pray as we ought to. He speaks again about "groaning." First, in reference to creation, and then to believers. And here in reference to the Holy Spirit.

Paul says that you and I do not know how to pray correctly. I think of Pope St. John Paul the Great, who when he would be in the midst of hundreds and thousands of people, would bow his head, close his eyes and instantly be transported to the very presence of God. It was said that those standing near him actually could hear him groan, as St. Paul describes.

Other times, it is shock, anger, loss, helplessness or guilt that prevents us from praying properly. We don't know what to say; we don't know how to begin our prayer. Sometimes the silence and the tears are prayer enough.

From this we learn that prayer involves both tension and continuity between the desires of creation, the hope of believers, and the intervention of the Holy Spirit. St. Paul uses a rare word here, *entynkano*, which means to "intercede" or to "plead." It also means "to share responsibility." St. Paul refers to the Holy Spirit in court-room terminology. The Holy Spirit will plead on our behalf, like a defense attorney. The Spirit will later be called the *Advocate*, the One who speaks on our behalf. The Holy Spirit shares the task with us.

Jesus never guaranteed that every baptized Catholic would be an A+ member of God's Kingdom on earth. The Church does contain hypocrites: large ones and small ones, ordained and non-ordained, young and old and in between. But Jesus tells us that there is still room in the Church for all of them, all of us.

It would be wonderful to be a Church where all its members, from children right up to the Pope, always practiced what we preached. But creating a completely pure Church is God's work, not ours; and the time for God's final purification is not yet. But it is close. As close as our own death. We can no longer remain superficial, lukewarm, indifferent, imperfect and bored. It IS up to us to make a difference in ourselves and in the world in which we live.

It's rare that a Congressional motion in Washington, D.C. gets bipartisan support. But instituting Parents' Day on the fourth Sunday of July to "recognize, uplift, and support the role of parents in the rearing of children" did just that in 1994. No matter how we vote on Election Day, every day of the year parents deserve our thanks for doing the toughest and most vital job in America: preparing the future.

Any parent can tell you: Raising children involves plenty of plowed earth and lots of sown seed. Parents sow continual lessons of kindness, self-control, unselfishness, and forgiveness, hoping their children will incorporate these same traits. But most parents admit they're guilty of sowing the occasional weed, too.

A sharp word of shaming slips out in an unguarded moment, shattering the expression on a child's face in a way that's unmistakable—and perhaps familiar from how we were raised. Even a good parent may ignore a small negative behavior that blooms into a real problem for the child later on. Our adult vices can't be hidden from our children forever. If we swear, sooner or later they'll hear us do it. If we gossip or get ugly about other groups of people, our children with disturbing accuracy will mirror that kind of talk back to us.

Parents, grandparents, teachers, and coaches -- we who have direct contact with children have a special responsibility to provide them with the right elements of character they need to become "good" people. As the book of Wisdom says, if we want to raise up a just society, our children must understand that "those who are just must be kind," because justice isn't the same as vengeance or mercilessness. It's possible to do the right thing, to stand up for what's right -- and also respect the dignity and humanity of the person who's in the wrong. Of course, if we've yet to learn this lesson ourselves, it's much harder to pass it on to our children.

God is just and right. Those who believe in God claim God as the very source of justice and right-ness. God doesn't have to justify the divine will, as Wisdom points out, since no one is bigger than God to refute it. Simply by willing it, God's will becomes law. So let's be clear on this: God wills to be the master of might who judges with "clemency" and "lenience." Wow. The God who desires the good harvest is merciful about the weeds for the harvest's sake. So let's not turn our back on our children, or any children, who fail to produce the perfect yield. As a community and a nation, let's plow some more, and sow again.

50 years ago, the City of Detroit was the victim of racial and civil disturbance and rebellion. The fallout from July, 1967 is still being felt generations later. The Archbishop of Detroit, Allen Vigneron, has a letter in today's bulletin commenting on that tragic time and what we as believers can do to be a light in the darkness.

We have with this this weekend a dedicated group of parish missionaries from here and from St. Michael Parish in Sterling Heights who are going to be

commissioned, blessed and sent to Kentucky to be “family” for some of the poorest of the poor in our country. To be fruitful seeds to combat the weeds of discrimination, prejudice and stereotypes. We thank you and your leaders, Renee’ and Michelle, for hearing the Lord’s call, for coming forward to serve, and for being a light shining in the darkness. May the Holy Spirit, which guided Our Lady, St. Martin de Porres and St. Michael to serve and to protect those in need, guide your steps, inspire your faith, and deepen your love for the Church and for humanity. AMEN!