

[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. Always merciful and gracious, always slow to anger and abounding in kindness, always good and forgiving, God listens and waits. 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.

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 by Jesus the *Advocate*, the One who speaks on our behalf. The Holy Spirit shares the task with us.

For Matthew, faith is never stagnant. If there's faith, there's growth: good seed planted in a field, a tiny mustard seed growing into a mighty bush, yeast making the dough rise and turning wheat into wholesome bread. If I'm alive in God, there should be plenty of signs of growth in my life.

Where in your life do you see signs of life growth flowing from your faith?  
How do you handle the "weeds" in your own life? Do you let their presence choke the growth of the good wheat?

Once upon a time, a young couple moved into their first home in early spring, and soon discovered that the woman who owned the house before them had been a wonderful gardener. Each new day of spring seemed to reveal another flower, plant, or shrub coming to life.

Luckily, the neighbors living on either side of the house were patient with them. They began to offer gentle advice and instruction. Olga leaned over the fence and said with a kind smile, "You know, that tall plant you keep watering every day? That one's a weed. And not only that, but you are yanking plants."

We all need spiritual neighbors who have learned a thing or two about the weeds and the wheat and how they crop up in our lives. Listen to the people who know. Cultivate sources of wisdom in your life. Because life isn't just a bed of roses!

Dear friends, there is a virus circulating not only in the world but also in the Church. And I am not speaking about COVID-19. This virus cultivates disunity, fracturing the communion that Christ has called us to. This virus is spread via Face Book, blogs and Twitter feeds, infecting Catholics the world over.

There have always been arguments in the Church. Disagreement is not disunity. Fruitful disagreement is part of a healthy Church life. That's why we have had Councils in our history. But what we are experiencing in the present is

not fruitful argumentation. It is Catholics who believe themselves capable of assuming the role of God in judging the human heart. Jesus warns us that this judgement is not our responsibility. We are not the ones to separate the wheat and the weeds.

Sure, we can see the difference between the two. But we lack the ability to pull out the weeds without destroying the wheat. It is God alone at the end of time who will separate the wheat and the weeds. The weeds will be thrown into the fires to be destroyed. But it is not the harvesters, the workers in the field, who are charged with this mission. It is God.

The holy man or woman can transform a Church. Just a bit of leaven and conversion is possible.

Ignatius Loyola, the soldier becomes Ignatius, the founder of the Jesuits.

Oscar Romero, the staunch bishop becomes Oscar Romero, the martyr.

Dorothy Day, the atheist becomes Dorothy Day, the Servant of God.

The Church is on pilgrimage, moving toward purity, toward total communion with a merciful God. Weeds can become wheat. Wheat can become weeds. God has allowed the Church to exist in history, in time and space, for the sake of conversion. The only person's holiness I can judge is my own. I can discern my own infidelity, my own apathy, the weeds that choke the love in my heart. This, I can and should change. Let us pray that all the weeds -- starting with myself -- may become wheat. And may the leaven of divine love infuse the whole batch of us. Together. AMEN!