

16th Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)
(Wisdom 12:13.16-19 / Matthew 13:24-43)
20.07.2014

Gentle & Patient

Some of us may remember the time when God was described as an angry judge ready to punish, or as an offended and demanding king. Moreover, at all times, we have been tempted to infer that because God is strong and powerful, he must be tough and strict.

All this has somewhat changed, and yet regularly and unfortunately, each time there is a natural disaster somewhere in the world, we hear Christian clerics who argue that the disaster is the result of God's wrathful judgement; a God who, because he is just, has to be merciless.

We must acknowledge that the God revealed by Jesus Christ invites us to a complete change of perspective, to a deep conversion: we think that we are strong when we are hard and implacable, while God shows his strength in being kind and gentle; we think that we are powerful when we are distant and controlling, while God shows he is all-powerful by drawing alongside us and being with us always, respecting our freedom; we think that we are wise while God's ways are considered as foolish; we think that we are just by condemning and labelling people while God shows he is just by pardoning us over and over again and by justifying sinners; we think that we win over our supposed enemies by raising our voice and thumping the table angrily while God patiently dialogues with us; we think that we are rich by accumulating things and clinging greedily to what we have and who we are, while God shows he is rich through being generous and sharing with us who he is in Jesus Christ through his Spirit.

In fact God can be gentle and patient because he is not afraid, he knows that he is God, the creator of heaven and earth, the source and the end of all things. It is by his will that all things exist and are created (Cf. Rev 4:11). Very often, our displays of authority, of strict obedience to the rule, of control and of anger betray our insecurity and our fear of being inadequate, vulnerable or rejected. Like dogs, the more we bark, the more we are afraid.

We would like things to be black or white; we would like to be able to fix all our problems at once.

The parable of the wheat and the darnel reveals to us a God who is extremely patient with each one of us. However, before going any further it may be important to dispel a misunderstanding which could arise when we read this parable: the world is not made up of good people – wheat that has been sown, virtuous people who will shine in the kingdom of God – and bad people – darnel that has been sown, bad people who will burn at the end of time; it is fairer and more challenging to realise that, in you and me, there is both wheat and darnel, in each one of us the Lord sows his grace, and in each one of us the devil sows its seeds of discord and division. The first conclusion is that there is no room for pointing the finger to the “subjects of the evil ones”, the line separating good and evil runs through every human heart. At the end of the day we are all beneficiaries of God's patience with the darnel which is in the field of our hearts.

God's patience is not a sign of his disinterest in our lives. The end of time and the judgement which it entails will not happen on an impulse of God's arbitrary will.

God is not tardy, when you respect people you are not tardy, and God respects us. He is patient. He is patient because he loves us. He knows that we are not going to blossom in one day, that there is a time for the sowing, a time for growth, a time for rest, a time for

pruning and a time for the harvest. Our lives are a long journey, a process made up of progress and setbacks, of discovery and loss, of failures and achievements, of closed doors and new opportunities. The Lord knows this and that is why he gives us time.

Moreover, we have to remember that none of us sees the whole field of his or her life. We are only ploughing a small part of our lives at a time and it is only from above that things can be seen in their entirety. This is why we have to be humble and patient when we judge our lives or the lives of others, God alone is able to see the whole picture of our lives.

Whatever we may have done or whatever may happen in our lives, the Lord never gives up on us. He keeps hope that his grace within us will bear fruit at the right time. God's patience and gentleness are a call for us to change, to come back to him. They are the sign, that with him, there is always a way forward.

A few years ago during our community retreat we were reminded the simple truth that we have to be careful because not only do we grow what we sow but we grow what we water too.

This morning we could ask ourselves: in the garden of my life, in the gardens of the lives of those around me, what do I want to grow, what do I want to see blossoming?

In our country, in our families, in our communities, in our personal lives, by our words and deeds, sometimes we water bitterness, rivalry and jealousy. We may be so focused on the darnel, on what is wrong and dark in us or in others, that we do not care for the wheat properly, we do not tend to what is right and positive. We may feel so threatened that we end up denying ourselves the possibility of being gentle and patient, considerate and open to real dialogue. Then we manure the darnel and prevent the wheat from growing.

Our personal background may not have predisposed us for work in a garden, we may be completely ignorant about grass and plants and flowers... however in his letter to the Ephesians, St Paul gives us the best advice in regard to the garden of our lives: "Be always humble, gentle and patient" (4:2 GNB). In so doing we will mirror the unbounded gentleness and the boundless patience of our God and we will be seeds of transformation in our world.