

16th Sunday of the Year A July 17, 2011 – Fr. Gerald Haemmerle

Every year I have a small garden, some flowers in the front and in the back of the rectory. Fr. Haft was in charge of the vegetable garden. This year I have assumed that role, but just tomatoes, three large healthy plants. I enjoy watering them, almost every morning, early, or in the evening. I do not like to weed the garden, it is hard work, but these past two days I have been doing that. The flower garden looks better, and I assume the tomato plants will get more nutrients since it does not have to compete with the weeds. After reading our gospel today, is our Lord really telling us to let the weeds grow? He is talking about a different situation, a wheat field. In a wheat field, the wheat is growing so closely together, that if you started to pull up the weeds, you would probably damage the wheat. And although our Lord is talking about wheat and weeds, he is really talking about us human beings.

Who are the weeds, and who are the wheat? That is the real question. I would suggest that the weeds are all those who disagree with me on politics, or religion, or in almost anything else you might mention, or those are weeds who are different than I am. And the wheat are those who agree with me, or who are like me. Don't we all feel that way?

Several weeks ago, during a weekday homily, I mentioned that the one sin I probably hear the most in the reconciliation room is judging others, and being quick to do so. How important it is that we try to see the good in the other person. I was amazed at how many people who were there that morning stopped by and told me how that hit home, and how true it is of them.

What is a lesson from our gospel today? First of all it tells us that God is very patient, "let the weeds and wheat grow together, I will sort them out later." Thank God, God is patient, not like us who are quick to judge, to root up and throw out. I am grateful to God that He is so patient, because I know that we are all a mixture of weed and wheat. God gives us time to grow up, to mature, to overcome some of our faults, to become the person He made us to be. For most of us, that takes a lifetime.

It seems to me that right now our church seems to be more interested in identifying the weeds in the church and throwing them out. There was a bishop in Australia who recently suggested that maybe it's time for the church, in light of the priest shortage, to consider other options like ordaining married men or women. He was given early retirement. The church is quick to say who should not receive communion, whether that be someone in an invalid marriage, a different sexual orientation or whatever. Thank God Jesus was patient, Jesus did not exclude others so quickly.

This coming week we are going to celebrate the feast of St. Mary Magdalene. I believe Jesus' attitude toward her should be our attitude toward all of our fellow brothers and sisters. Mary Magdalene is often wrongly depicted as the harlot, the sinful woman who washed the feet of Jesus. That for centuries has been a mistaken identity. But she was a woman, one possessed by 7 evil spirits. To the Jewish leaders, she was the epitome of an outsider, a weed to be uprooted and thrown out. But not to Jesus. He recognized in her a goodness that others missed, he healed her and took her into his company of disciples. She and other women, the scriptures say, cared for the needs of the disciples out of their own means. Mary Magdalene stayed with our Lord while he died on the cross, while all the others fled, and on Easter Sunday He first appeared to her and told her to go to the other disciples to announce his resurrection.

Our church is full of weeds and wheat, saints and sinners. If we wanted a church filled with only saints, it would be an empty church. Thank God that God is patient with us. Thank God that He sees good in us that even we can't see. May we learn to be patient, may we learn to see the good in others.