

Sunday Homily

19 JULY 2020

YEAR A

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

“The one who sows the good seed is the Son
of Man”

Matthew 13:37

Illustration

You can walk into some school classrooms and find a model of attentiveness, application and industry, with an atmosphere of good humour and comradeship. The teacher is respected, the rules obeyed and the examination results confirm what a good school it is. But you can walk into another classroom in the same school and discover a bedlam of noise, disturbance and an undercurrent of violence which holds no promise of success for students or the school.

The difference is in the conditions under which the young people come to the school. Within each of these classrooms we would find sincere young people, keen to learn, and others who care not one jot for education, even among students whose background and advantages predispose them to self-confidence and the desire to learn. We would find others whose poverty and lack of stability can undermine their potential and self-respect, ill preparing them for the demands of school, against which they rebel.

If we were school inspectors, how should we deal with the troublemakers? Close the school? That would be unfair to the industrious children. Weed out the nuisances? But perhaps external circumstances beyond their control are to blame for their attitudes. Perhaps we should wait until they are at the end of their education to examine their overall results, to allow for greater inspiration and the effects of a healthy, optimistic environment on their growth and ability to change; and then permit their own actions to determine their futures.

Gospel Teaching

There has been much discussion about this parable and to whom it applies. It would be easiest to believe that it is the world in general. It could refer to those people in Israel who would not accept Jesus as the Messiah. But others suggest that it actually refers to us, the members of Christ's own Church.

In his explanation of the parable, Jesus says that it is the Son of Man “who sows the good seed” and “the field is the world”. But those whom Jesus draws into membership of his Church

gather in his name and it is amongst these, his chosen, that the weeds are sown by the evil one. There has always been evil in the world at large and it was partly to overcome such evil that Jesus came in the first place. But as this Gospel was written when the Church was in its early stages of development it may be a warning. Just because the teaching of Jesus is the perfect model to be followed, some of its adherents are not perfect, just like the errant children in school.

It would be wonderful to think that the influence of Jesus would instantly transform his followers to mirror him in every way, but life is not like that and neither are people. Spiritual opportunity, like education, can transform its participants but also may be abused; a good influence can turn rotten and can poison the whole. Even in the best surroundings, some good people change, becoming like weeds in a field of good grain. Jesus warns us against assuming that all people in his field of activity are wholesome. It is his word, his influence, his life which must guide us, or we may end up collected together with the weeds and dealt with accordingly.

Application

However, our next question might be, “Can a bad seed change its nature?” We need to watch out for and guard against the bad influences even where trustworthiness might be assumed. But what about those children whose disadvantaged start in life disturbs their behaviour? Or those church members who have been swayed by other influences? What about the possibility of change, for naughty children, for developing churches, and for us?

It is important to heed Jesus’ warning because our eternal life depends upon it. But it is crucial that we do not become paralysed by fear. Jesus never gave up on anyone; indeed, just before his own death he forgave a criminal and promised him a place in heaven – not sometime in the future or at “the end of the age”, but that very day. Leaving behind our evil ways is an opportunity we can take up every single day. Forgiveness by God is complete for those who repent.

So perhaps, then, the answer to our question is “no”: a seed cannot change its own character, but God can, by his gifts and the promises which he makes clear through Jesus, promises which he keeps.