

## 16<sup>TH</sup> WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME – YEAR A – 23<sup>RD</sup> JULY 2023

Some of us find being tidy a real problem - most of the time I am content to live with a certain amount of mess but when the papers on my desk start breeding and taking up floor space - and when important letters and documents get lost amidst a lot of waste paper I am provoked into taking action - I get manic about being tidy and have a radical clear out. And after a while I slide back into old, untidy habits.

Today's parable of the wheat and the darnel reminds me a bit like my desk - on seeing the darnel, a poisonous weed, among the wheat, it is tempting to want to weed it out, just as it is tempting for me to get rid of the piles of paper on the desk. The trouble is that in being too zealous about clearing up I might pluck up the wheat with the weeds, in other words get rid of important papers as well as the rubbish.

Life is by nature messy and untidy. We always have to contend with living amidst a certain amount of chaos and upset. Instinctively we like to have everything organised and in its place, but a lot of the time this just isn't possible. We have to accept too that our lives are a mixture of good and bad and learn to be patient – and not just with ourselves, but with others too. There is always the temptation to stereotype people - to condemn their misdeeds and misfortunes - to want to cast them out like the weeds and the waste paper - We like things to be black and white.

The Church too is made up of wheat and weeds, of saints and sinners. it is not the place of the Church to set up witch hunts or organise purges. The Church is not God. As Christians we have no authority to pronounce the final judgement on anyone. The last word cannot be said about anyone until death, and then it is God's part, not ours, to say it. Just as in the gospel the wheat and the darnel are allowed to grow and only become separated at the harvest, so too in our lives the good and the bad are inextricably intertwined until God makes the final judgement.

We should take our cue from Jesus: For he who had no trace of weed in him was patient and understanding towards those whose lives were filled with the weeds of sin and failure. Take the disciples - Jesus saw weeds aplenty in Peter's life – but he also saw the wheat too. And he knew that with encouragement and patience the wheat would prevail. And it did.

We can get it wrong about people. In focussing on their bad points we can fail to see the good. For all we know there might be another story, another perspective. Locking others into our self-designated boxes we can fail to appreciate that people can change.

Our first reading reminded us that God is lenient and merciful: and that we must be prepared to show others something of the mercy and patience God shows us. Who are we to judge others? We are all struggling, sinful, weak and often bemused by the messiness of life. None of us has all the answers. We are all journeying together. None of us can afford to sit in judgement on others, to try and dictate to them how they must live their lives.

We all have good and bad inside us. Our attempts to hide such a fact may sometimes be successful, but will always be dishonest. Holiness is not a matter of trying to be something we are not, but of accepting ourselves as we are, striving all the time to allow God to bring out what is best in us.