

16th Sunday of Ordinary Time

Cycle A

July 17, 2011

Saint Margaret Parish, Bel Air

Sunflowers and Weeds

I have always enjoyed some gardening – at least when I have time to do it.

I remember the first time I planted sunflowers. I really like them and was looking forward to them forming the background to the other plants and flowers.

Well, as the sunflower seeds sprouted, there were also some weeds. And it was difficult to tell the difference between the leaves of these weeds and the leaves of the sunflowers.

I realized this too late and pulled up some of the sunflower plants along with the weeds. And then I decided to stop weeding in that area.

I figured that soon the sunflowers would grow so tall and start to bloom that it would be easy to tell the difference between them and the weeds. That is exactly what happened and I ended up with some beautiful sunflowers and was easily able to weed around them.

Wheat and Weeds

This is what Jesus is talking about in today's parable.

The farmer tells his workers not to pull up the weeds that are in with the wheat. His reason is this kind of weed here looks like wheat in its early stages and you might pull up both weeds and wheat.

And beyond that, this kind of weed had roots that intertwined with the roots of the wheat. So, even if you could identify and pull out the weeds, you would probably injure the wheat in the process.

Well, as with any parable, Jesus is really teaching us something about life and how we are to follow him.

Not Saying: Don't Guide

But first, what is Jesus not saying?

Jesus is not saying that we should not guide our children and youth. We need to guide them, for example, in what is right and wrong and in choosing good friends.

Also, Jesus is not saying that we should condone certain things – things like foul language, racism, abortion, and on it goes. We need to be a light for our world when it comes to these things.

Saying 1: Don't Weed Out

What then is Jesus saying with this teaching about the wheat and the weeds?

First, Jesus is saying: don't weed out one another. He wants us to resist the human tendency to separate, divide, and exclude.

Sometimes religion and those who are religious can get into this. In recent years, there has been some of this tendency right within Catholicism.

This just does not seem consistent with today's gospel. Jesus calls us to be patient and even give what looks like weeds the chance to grow into wheat.

Saying 2: Don't Label

That leads to the second thing Jesus is saying: Do not call others weeds.

Again, there is a human tendency to do this. The problem is that it is a dualistic approach – we versus them, the good versus the bad.

The best of our Catholic tradition has condemned this kind of dualism. Jesus calls us to a more unitive approach.

This means that we see ourselves and others as one because in fact, there is a mix of wheat and weeds right in me and right in you. Jesus is patient with us in letting us grow and he wants us to be patient with others.

Saying 3: Nourish the Wheat

And that leads to the third thing Jesus is saying: Concentrate more on the wheat.

Nourish the wheat, just like the sunflowers in my garden, and it will grow well and be easily distinguishable from weeds. Eventually there will be a good harvest and God in his own way will take care of any weeds.

In other words, act positively in promoting what is good. A Franciscan theologian, Father Richard Rohr offers some wonderful advice on this and I want to conclude with it.

Father Rohr says: *"If you want others to be more loving, choose to love first. If you want a reconciled outer world, reconcile your own inner world."*

"If the world seems desperate, let go of your despair. If you want a just world, start being just in small ways yourself."

"If you want to find God, then honor God within you, and you will always see God beyond you. For it is only God in you who knows where and how to look for God."

In short, pay more attention to the wheat than to the weeds.