

Addressing Evil

16th Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year A)

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I think we are all well-aware that evil exists in our world. Even those of us who are more naïve now know from watching the news and seeing social media posts that everything is not right with the world and that human beings can do horrible things to each other. There is no better word for abuse, deceit, injustice, or violence than to call it evil.

In today's Gospel, Jesus confirms that evil indeed exists. He compares it to weeds growing in a field of wheat. When asked how the weeds got there, he says an enemy, symbolic of the devil, did this. For as strong as these words are, however, there is always a twist to his parables. The twist of this parable is found in the answer given to the question, "do you want us to go and pull them up." Many of us would jump at that if someone offered to do some weeding for us, but in this parable, the man says "no, if you pull up the weeds you might uproot the wheat along with them."

The insight of Jesus in the parable of the weeds and the wheat is that there is a certain way to address evil, both the evil in our world and the evil within our own hearts. It involves restraint, patience, and tolerance out of respect for the good still present.

Echoing the first reading from the book of Wisdom, we hear that God is indeed a God of justice and might, but also a God who is lenient and kind. Our fight against evil is therefore not as simple as it may seem.

Much damage has been done throughout history not only by those who have done evil, but also by those who have tried to root out evil.

- We think of the crusades and the inquisition, where the people who saw themselves as the good guys trying to spread their faith and teach proper doctrine got so carried away that they did great violence in the name of religion. To this day, the crusades and the inquisition are cited as two examples of why people are turned off by religion.
- We see this today in certain law enforcement entities who, though many are just trying to do their jobs of bringing about law and order, escalate situations to the point of someone getting seriously hurt or even killed.
- We see this today in Evangelical Christians who love Jesus but are so bothered by the secular agenda that they believe they no longer bound to act like Jesus because they are under siege and desperate times call for desperate measures.
- Lastly, we see this anytime we label something we don't like as evil when in reality we know that is the easy way out of

dealing with complex issues and we are not that innocent ourselves.

In all these cases, the people who thought they were doing the 'right' and 'godly' thing turned out to be as evil as the so-called bad guys.

Evil needs to be addressed, but in a way that doesn't harm the good already present.

Am I so focused on rooting out evil that I forget to see the good already present in everything and everyone? How can we balance both the justice of God and mercy of God when dealing with the shortcomings of ourselves and other people?

As we continue with this mass, let us pray for the leniency and kindness of God, and the restraint, patience, and tolerance of the master in the parable. As the parable teaches, some things need to be left up to God and the angels at the end of the age. Until then, may we follow the great wisdom contained in the Serenity Prayer.

God, grant me the serenity
to accept the things I cannot change,
courage to change the things I can,
and wisdom to know the difference.