

## Homily for the 16<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time – Fr. John Schnurr

The Gospel today (The parable of the weeds among the wheat) gives us an insight into one of the biggest questions we can have. Why does God allow evil to exist, and in many cases, to why does he allow evil to prosper? This is a favourite question of those who attempt to disprove the existence of God, because, they say, if God is all powerful and all loving, then he should want to do something about evil, and he should be able to do something about the evil in the world.

But if we look to our readings and Gospel, we can begin to understand it from God's perspective. For one thing, God does not "cause" evil – it is the enemy who sows the weeds in the field. But God allows the weeds and wheat to grow together because of his mercy – Yes, God could remove all the evil in the world, but that wouldn't be the merciful thing to do. I came across a post on facebook a few weeks ago, and when I went back to find it, it had disappeared into the endless abyss of facebook junk, so this is not a direct quote, and I can't remember who said it, but it went something like this: "It would be easy to just eliminate all the evil people in the world to be free from evil. But evil is not in certain persons, but in each of our hearts, and no one wants to lose a piece of their heart."

I think that this helps us to see why God permits evil to grow alongside the good. If God were to eliminate all evil in the world, then no one would be left. This would be the wheat being uprooted with the weeds that Jesus speaks of. And so God permits evil so that we can experience conversion and turn toward him. The first reading says: "Your strength is the source of righteousness, and *your sovereignty over all* causes you to spare all."

Think about this... The more powerful a ruler is, the more he is able to allow his subjects to make mistakes... because he is powerful enough to "make right" the mistakes. Take the example of a flight instructor – If the instructor is not very skilled, the student could easily put the airplane into a situation that is beyond the instructor's ability to recover from. A weak instructor will therefore hover over the controls and not let the student make any mistakes – they cannot allow "evil" if you will, because they cannot recover from it. However, a good flight instructor will allow the student to make mistakes, because he knows that the airplane is always under his control. The student is allowed to make mistakes and learn from them ("evil" is permitted) because the airplane is never out of control as long as that good instructor is on board. Which instructor do you think will produce a better student? The one who never could allow any

mistakes, or one who could allow the student to make mistakes, and learn from them? So it is with God... he is able to let good and evil prosper together, because nothing is beyond his control. He can allow evil to prosper *because* there is nothing beyond his mercy, because he is able to recover us from a bad situation, because he is waiting patiently for the conversion of the sinner. And very often, we learn the greatest lessons from our worst mistakes. A great conversion can only happen after a great sin. Some of the greatest saints were great sinners before their conversion. St. Peter, St. Paul, St. Matthew, St. Augustine, St. Thomas Becket, ect. Their conversion is a witness to God's patience and mercy, and we benefit from their example and intercession.

I think that this perspective should also help us relate to others who we would be quick to designate as "weeds". It's easy to spot and criticize the faults of another. But what if I can realize that I also have faults, and recognize in my own life how gracious God has been to me? How should I treat others if I realize that I too am in need of God's mercy and how patient God has been with me and my own shortcomings?

Every person is called to be a saint, and we are all at different stages in our journey of faith, so may God help us to always strive for our own conversion, to accept his mercy, and to show his patience to those around us.