

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

There is a stage in recovery when we begin to recognize that sobriety and transformation are not always the same thing. External behaviors may change before the heart is fully renewed. We experience periods of victory alongside moments of temptation. We discover new freedom while also becoming aware of deeper patterns that still need healing. Rather than discouraging us, this growing awareness becomes part of God's work of transforming us from the inside out.

This Sunday's gospel speaks directly into that reality through the parable of the weeds and the wheat (Matthew 13:24-30). Jesus describes a field where good seed has been planted, yet an enemy comes during the night and sows weeds among the wheat. When both begin to grow, the servants ask if they should remove the weeds immediately. The master replies, *"No, if you pull up the weeds you might uproot the wheat along with them. Let them grow together until harvest."*

Those seeking freedom from lust often understand this tension well. We sincerely desire purity, integrity, and healthy relationships, yet old patterns do not disappear overnight. Temptation can still arise. Distorted ways of thinking may continue to surface. Shame may whisper that because weeds still exist, no real growth has taken place. Jesus offers a different perspective. The presence of weeds does not mean the wheat has stopped growing.

Recovery invites us to stop measuring our lives solely by the presence or absence of temptation. Instead, we begin paying attention to the direction of our hearts. Are we becoming quicker to seek God? More willing to ask for help? More honest about our struggles? More committed to living with integrity? These are signs that healthy roots are growing beneath the surface, even while God continues His work of purification.

This understanding protects us from two dangerous extremes. One is discouragement, believing we have failed because temptation remains. The other is complacency, assuming we no longer need vigilance because we have experienced progress. Recovery calls us to reject both. We acknowledge that growth is taking place while remaining humble enough to recognize our continuing need for grace.

This is where practical recovery wisdom becomes essential. "First things first" reminds us to protect our relationship with God before anything else. "Easy does it" encourages patience instead of demanding instant perfection. "Progress, not perfection" reminds us that sanctification unfolds over time. "Let go and let God" helps us surrender outcomes we cannot control while remaining responsible for today's choices.

The second reading offers further encouragement. Saint Paul reminds us that the Holy Spirit intercedes for us because God searches every heart and knows what is taking place within us (Romans 8:26-27). God sees both the wheat and the weeds. He knows our sincere desire for holiness, even when we struggle to see it ourselves. His mercy is never based on appearances alone but on His complete knowledge of who we are and who we are becoming.

The Twelve Steps help us cooperate with this grace. Daily inventory, honest conversations with a sponsor or trusted companion, prayer, accountability, and prompt confession when needed all help cultivate healthy soil while preventing weeds from spreading unchecked. Recovery is sustained not by hiding our struggles but by bringing them into the light before they have an opportunity to take deeper root.

Over time, genuine fruit begins to emerge. We become more honest, more peaceful, and more capable of loving others as persons rather than objects. Our relationships grow healthier

because they are no longer driven primarily by fear, fantasy, or self-gratification. We discover that chastity is not merely the absence of lust but the freedom to love rightly.

The parable of the weeds and the wheat reminds us that God is patient as He forms us. As we continue in recovery, we are invited to remain vigilant without becoming discouraged, to cooperate with grace each day, and to trust that the One who planted good seed will faithfully bring His work to completion.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Where do you find yourself becoming discouraged because you still experience temptation instead of recognizing the growth God is already bringing about?
- What practical habits help you cultivate the "good seed" of honesty, chastity, and integrity in your daily life?
- How have humility, accountability, and God's grace helped you respond differently to temptation than you did earlier in recovery?

MASS READINGS

FIRST READING Wisdom 12:13, 16-19

RESP. PS. Psalm 86:5-6, 9-10, 15-16

SECOND READING Romans 8:26-27

GOSPEL Matthew 13:24-43